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ABSTRACT

The evaluation of the Los Angeles Alternative School (LAA) was designed to determine whether the school was an alternative school in the sense that it operated under a set of values and related operational principles which differ from those which guide traditional public schools. Anthropological field methods rather than traditional research methology were used to collect the data. The major findings were: (1) test scores did not reveal any overall shifts in achievement either above or below the level expected on the basis of prior performance. (2) Instruction was characterized by freedom of choice for the student. (3) Most parents planned to re-enroll their children in the school. (4) The primary sources of parental dissatisfaction were a disagreement concerning instructional philosophy and the teaching strategies designed to develop a sense of personal responsibility and independence in the students. (5) Decision-making at the school is extensively democratized. (6) The role of the principal is that of a coordinator or facilitator rather than that of an authority or power figure. Instructional leadership was excluded from the role of the principal. (7) There was no satisfactory method for regularly monitoring student progress or for reporting progress to parents. (8) Competent teaching aides were important to the functioning of the instructional program. (EH)

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**CENTER FOR THE
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EVALUATION OF THE LOS ANGELES ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL:
A REPORT TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Rodney W. Skager, Principal Investigator
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Robert Russock
Edward Schumacher

August 1973

Center for the Study of Evaluation
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FOREWORD

The evaluation of the Los Angeles Alternative School was supported primarily by a faculty development grant from the Spencer Foundation. We are greatly indebted to the committee administering Spencer Foundation Funds at UCLA, especially to its Chairman, John I. Goodlad, Dean of the Graduate School of Education. We are also deeply indebted to staff, parents, and students at the Los Angeles Alternative School, all of whom were unstintingly open and cooperative toward the evaluation effort. Our appreciation is also extended to our project secretary, Marsha Albrecht, whose work throughout was diligent and thorough, and to James Burry of the Center for the Study of Evaluation whose careful reading of the manuscript resulted in a more polished document.

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University of California at Los Angeles
August, 1973

PERSONNEL

The evaluation team was made up of four individuals. Robert Russock and Edward Schumacher are doctoral students in the Philosophy of Education Specialization at the UCLA Graduate School of Education. Katherine Morehouse is a recent recipient of the Ed.D. in Educational Sociology from UCLA's Graduate School of Education. Rodney Skager is Associate Professor of Education at UCLA and Director of the Project for Research on Objectives-Based Evaluation at the Center for the Study of Evaluation, one of eight university affiliated research and development centers funded by the National Institute of Education.

OVERVIEW

The Los Angeles Alternative School is the first of its kind to emerge in the second-largest school district in the nation. Its existence as a model of one approach to alternative education provides its own participants, the district, and the larger community with an invaluable testing ground for new ideas about public education.

The information from which this report on the Los Angeles Alternative School is derived was collected during the Spring Quarter of the 1972-1973 school year. The methodology of the study differs sharply in many respects from conventional evaluation practice. We have relied heavily on anthropological field methods rather than on traditional laboratory research methodology involving control groups, randomization of subjects, and the like. In addition to test scores and other information obtained from student records, the data base utilized in the project consists of records of observations, interviews, notes taken during meetings of the school, and documents made available by the school. In order to collect such data it was necessary for the evaluation team to spend a great deal of time at the school. Extensive observations of the instructional process were made. Many individuals, adults and students, were interviewed, and almost all of the policy-related meetings of the school which occurred during the period of the evaluation were attended by one or more members of the evaluation team.

The intent of the evaluation also differs sharply from the usual evaluation study in terms of its principal goal. Our purpose is not to render a judgement as to whether the Los Angeles Alternative School (LAAS) is successful or unsuccessful; this judgement can only be made by the individual reader in terms of his or her own beliefs about what schools should, or should not, be like. This report will make it clear that the Los Angeles Alternative School is indeed an "alternative" in the sense that it operates under a set of values and related operational principles which differ in many respects from those which guide traditional public schools. For this reason, some of the conclusions about the school contained in this report will be interpreted by those who agree with the school's philosophy as signs that the school is successful. Others, holding different values, will perhaps view those same conclusions as signs that the school is unsuccessful.

We have attempted throughout the report to avoid making judgements based on our own educational philosophies which, in fact, differ among the four members of the evaluation team. Our basic objective is to describe critical aspects of the school's functioning, particularly those of instructional and organizational concern. We are fully aware that a number of citizen groups in the Los Angeles community are vitally interested in the establishment of additional alternative schools, and that the Los Angeles Alternative School provides the first model of public-supported alternative education in Los Angeles. The form the school has taken and the problems its participants have had to respond to should provide relevant information for those who are planning future alternative schools, as well as for the school administrators and elected officials who must pass judgement on those plans.

SECTION I

MAJOR FINDINGS

This section summarizes the main findings of the evaluation study. The information that substantiates these findings is contained in ensuing sections of the report. In most cases the findings are based on more than a single source of information. At the conclusion of each of the 16 main findings, sections of the report which are relevant to the finding are cited.

The Findings

(1) The student body of the Los Angeles Alternative School (LAAS) was remarkably heterogeneous. Although there was a high proportion of gifted students, there was also a significant proportion of students who had fallen far behind expected grade level at the time they entered the school. In addition, the student body was diverse ethnically. Further, while statements of teachers, parents, and some students suggested that the student body contained a significant proportion of students who had experienced severe incompatibilities with their previous schooling, this was clearly not true for all of the students.

Sources: Descriptive information about the student body is contained in Sections III and IX. Information reflecting prior incompatibility with schooling appears primarily in Sections VII and VIII.

(2) Scores on tests administered as part of the state testing program do not reveal any overall shifts in achievement either above or below what would have been expected on the basis of prior performance of the

students. First graders scored at approximately grade level in reading and second graders made over one year of progress, scoring somewhat above grade level. Third graders did not score appreciably higher in reading than they had one year earlier, although they remained approximately at grade level. Fourth graders scored at approximately grade level, or perhaps somewhat higher, while sixth graders appeared to make substantial progress on the reading test during the year.

Sources: Information on achievement test performance is contained in Section III.

(3) Instruction at the Los Angeles Alternative School is characterized by freedom of choice for the student. At the Core level (kindergarten to fifth grade) teachers provide learning centers, study groups, field trips, and a variety of different learning materials. The student is free to choose among these options or to choose none of them. It is agreed among staff at all levels that no student will be forced to learn anything he or she does not want to learn.

Sources: Virtually the entire report substantiates this finding. In particular, observations of students summarized in Section IV, interviews of teachers and aides reported in Section V, and interviews of parents and students discussed in Sections VII, VIII and IX tend to support this conclusion.

(4) The overriding goal of the school is to develop independent learners who are capable of assuming responsibility for making and acting on their own decisions about what to learn and how to learn it. The tactic used by the school to foster independence and self-responsibility is to assign responsibility to the student. In general, students are expected to take the initiative in starting learning activities and in selecting among available study options.

Sources: This conclusion is based on the same sources that were cited in (3) above, although the interviews of teachers reported in Section V establish the case independently.

(5) Observations of students at the school and interviews of parents and teachers revealed that some students exercised their freedom by choosing to engage in study activities, while others chose to play. The expectation shared by the staff and some of the parents was that those students who chose to play would begin to want to study after they had undergone a transitional period of adjustment to the freedom granted by the school.
Sources: The substantiation of this finding is seen in Section IV, reporting on observations of students at the school. Teachers' views about the reactions of students to the freedom appear in Section V.

(6) The tactic of leaving the decision about learning up to the individual student meant that the attention of the teaching staff was distributed differentially among the students. It appeared that the more outgoing and assertive the child, the more attention that child received. Conversely, the more a child avoided teachers and aides the less attention that child received. At the Core level, there was also evidence that gifted students tended as a group to engage significantly more frequently in study activities than non-gifted children, and consequently received more attention from the staff.
Sources: This finding is supported by the same sources as for (5) above, as well as by the comments made by parents in Sections VII and VIII.

(7) In a number of respects the physical site is inadequate, especially for the type of instructional program operated by the school. There is insufficient space, which makes for excessive noise and distracting movement. Storage space for instructional materials and on-going work is severely lacking, which makes it difficult to operate the learning centers in the way in which they were intended to operate. It is difficult or perhaps virtually impossible

to find quiet places appropriate for small group or individual work. Overcrowding and excessive noise caused by such overcrowding are cited by teachers and aides as significant negative factors from the standpoint of staff morale. Source: The problem of space and its utilization is discussed in the last part of Section V. Parents' views on the matter appear in Sections VII and VIII.

(8) Interviews of parents who had withdrawn one or more children from the school revealed the most common source of dissatisfaction to be fundamental disagreement between parents and staff concerning instructional philosophy. Most of the parents who had withdrawn children supported forms of open-structured education in which teachers take an active role in finding ways to motivate children to learn. The staff's decision to act in a more passive way, and to serve as facilitators rather than as activists, was seen by the majority of these parents as ignoring the needs of children who were not yet willing or able to take the initiative in the learning situation.
Source: Reactions of parents who had withdrawn children from the school are summarized in Section VII. The instructional philosophy of the teaching staff is discussed in Section V.

(9) The strategy that the teaching staff followed to develop a sense of personal responsibility and independence in the learners was in conflict with the kind of open-structured education desired by many parents who had either withdrawn from the school or planned to withdraw at the end of the year. Given the fact that the choice of whether to study and what to study was left up to the student, it was impossible for teachers to make many types of direct efforts to motivate and involve the students in learning. Interviews of parents whose children were remaining in the school suggested that this may be an issue that will continue to arise in the future.

Sources: Interviews of teachers in Section V and parents in Section VIII provide information relevant to this conclusion.

(10) Interviews of parents of students still enrolled in the school revealed that most parents intended to re-enroll one or more children in the Fall. The criticisms that this group made about the school paralleled those of parents who had withdrawn their children, with most statements expressing concern that some children had not yet begun to take the initiative in undertaking formal study activities. On the whole, however, this group was positive about the school, especially because many parents felt that their children were happier in LAAS than they had been previously.

Source: Section VIII summarizes interviews of parents of children still enrolled.

(11) Decision-making at LAAS is extensively democratized. Final authority on school policy is vested in a council consisting of teachers, parents, and students. Expectations held for the staff of the school, both teaching and administrative, parallel expectations held for students, in that individual staff members are expected to assume responsibilities without being told to do so by anyone in authority. On a number of occasions, this organizational arrangement has resulted in failure to communicate decisions, lack of clear delegation of responsibility, and failure to carry out all of the decisions made by various committees of the school.

Source: Information on the administrative organization and decision-making processes of the school is presented in Section VI. Reactions of parents to the issues related to administration and leadership are contained in Sections VII and VIII.

(12) The staff of the school and some of the parents have decided to vest a number of administrative functions in the person of a coordinator (or

facilitator) rather than in that of a principal (or authority). In the eyes of the teachers and many parents, the role of the principal of the school for the coming year is consistent with the notion of a coordinator rather than that of a principal empowered to give orders and delegate authority. On the other hand, some of the parents with children still enrolled, as well as many of the parents who have withdrawn, would prefer the school to have an administrator with more power.

Sources: Support for this finding is the same as for (11) above.

(13) The concept of the role of the principal for next year excludes the provision of leadership in the instructional area. Although there are plans for some revisions in the instructional process, it is unlikely that radical changes will be made in the near future. While there are plans for staff development next year, it is possible that the instructional program would benefit by a leadership having expertise in the techniques of open education. In this regard, the experience of the principal and many of the teachers is grounded in traditional, rather than open, schooling.

Source: This finding is supported by the same sources as for (11).

(14) In general, the school has not yet developed a satisfactory set of procedures for the regular monitoring of student progress or for reporting the results of that monitoring to parents. Students may work with several teachers, which leaves the student's advisor unaware of the full scope of the student's activities. Some students see very little of any teacher. At the Intermediate and Advanced level (roughly fifth grade and upwards) interviews of students revealed that many students had different criteria as to what it meant to take a class or to receive credit for that class.

Sources: A variety of sources of information contributed to this conclusion. Particularly relevant is Section V summarizing interviews of teachers and Section IX dealing with interviews of Intermediate and Advanced students. Comments by parents in Sections VII and VIII also touch upon this issue.

(15) Competent and responsible teaching aides were found to be especially important to the functioning of the instructional program. While there was insufficient time to develop an orientation program for aides at the beginning of the year, by the end of the year most of the aides at the school appeared to be enthusiastic and involved.

Source: Interviews and observations of aides are summarized in Section V.

(16) The report as a totality reflects the fact that different students have responded in different ways to the environment created by the school. Some students adapted quickly to the freedom and responsibility assigned to them and were busily involved in classes and projects. For other students this is not yet the case. Similarly, many parents are enthusiastic about the school and the effect it has had on their children while others are not. The staff is obviously dedicated to the school and intensely involved in the development of its programs. A similar evaluation of the school next year should produce important additional information. In particular, the assumptions of the staff about the future behavior of students who are not now significantly involved in formal learning activities need to be tested. Also of great interest will be the behavior of this year's kindergarten students, who have never experienced traditional schooling.

SECTION II

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The major sources of information which provide the basis of this report are described below. The conclusions stated in the preceeding section are, in most cases, based on two or more sources of information, since we attempted wherever possible to verify a conclusion based upon one information source by turning to other sources.

State Test Data

Scores reported from the May, 1973, state mandated testing program were available. In addition, the school office provided test scores from previous years on groups of students of particular interest. For example, we were able to compare the performance on the Cooperative Reading Test (Form 3B) of most of the third graders with their previous performance at grades one and two on other forms of the same test. Such time-series data made it possible to determine whether one year's attendance at the Los Angeles Alternative School was associated with a rise or decline in reading performance as measured by this particular test. The California Test of Basic Skills, administered at fourth and sixth grades, provides additional information. Results of the analysis of test data are reported in Section III.

LAAS Student Observation Schedule

This instrument (see Appendix I) was developed for use in a study of the instructional process at two age levels. It was used to obtain an in-depth assessment of the kinds of activities engaged in by two selected groups of children at the school. The schedule permitted easy recording of virtually any kind of activity the student engaged in during a given five- to ten-minute observational period. In addition, the source of the activity (e.g., student's decision, teacher's suggestion, peer-initiated) was recorded. By summing across 10 observational periods for each child (spread over approximately one month) it was possible to obtain a picture of that student's dominant modes of activity during school hours allotted to instruction. The motivation for this study, the way in which the students were selected, and the conclusions are summarized in Section IV.

Interviews of Teachers and Aides

Virtually all of the teachers and aides were interviewed at least once, and many more than once, on tape. These interviews were not formally structured, but were instead directed at general areas of inquiry. For example, one set of interviews of "Core" (primary level) staff probed for how the various learning centers at LAAS were set up and operated. At this time teacher's reactions to the school were solicited as well as information about anticipated future changes in the instructional program. Other interviews dealt with the use and training of aides. Students' advisors observed in the in-depth study of instruction were interviewed about their students after the observations were completed. The description of the learning centers set out in Section V is based on the intentions of CORE teachers as well as on the observations made by the evaluation team of center staff in actual operation. Other non-structured interview material is included in appropriate sections.

Administrative Organization and Policy-Setting

Evaluation team members attended five types of policy meetings: the Coordinating Council, composed of teachers, parents, and students, and which is responsible for final policy decisions under the by-laws of the school; the Town Hall, open to all participants in the school, parents, and any other interested parties and which under the by-laws makes recommendations to the Coordinating Council; teaching staff weekly meetings, held separately for primary (Core) and secondary (Intermediate and Advanced) staff; the meetings of the Core Planning Committee (parents and staff); and the staff weekend retreat. Reports were written by evaluation team members after attending all formal meetings. The reports indicated who attended the meeting, the intended agenda, the actual agenda (where there was a discrepancy), the decisions made, and issues that were raised relating to those decisions. This information, along with material from interviews of parents and staff, and documents from the school and its various committees, constitute the bases for Section VI of this report.

Interviews of Parents of Students Who Have Withdrawn

At the time the study was initiated (April, 1973) approximately 60 families had withdrawn one or more children from the school, constituting a total of approximately 80 children. One-half of the families were randomly selected and informed by mail that an interviewer would be calling them on the telephone to discuss their reactions to the school. The parents were assured that they were under no obligation whatsoever to respond and that any discussion they offered would be kept confidential. As it turned out, no one refused to be interviewed, although a few families who had moved out of the area could not be located. Parents were asked why LAAS was selected, what their original expectations were about the school, why the student withdrew, and how the student was adjusting to his or her new school. Many parents voluntarily discussed other matters. All information was recorded in the form of notes. This study is summarized in Section VII.

Interviews of Parents of Students Remaining in the School

Similar interviews were conducted of parents of students who had remained in the school. This sample of parents was also notified by mail that an interviewer would be calling by telephone. Although questions again bore on the reason for selecting the school, they now probed the present level of satisfaction with the school, as well as whether or not the student would be returning next year. About half of the interviews were recorded on tape, but only after receiving the parent's permission. The other half were recorded in the form of written notes. This sample of parents was not selected randomly. Rather, they were the parents of the approximately 30 children who had been observed in the study of the instructional process described above (using the LAAS Student Observation Schedule). We are aware that such non-random selection may have introduced an unknown type of bias into the study. However, this possibility was discounted in the face of the advantages involved in interviewing parents of children who had already been observed systematically at the school. The results of this study are summarized in Section VIII.

Secondary Student Interview Schedule

Structured interviews of a randomly selected, one-quarter sample of the Intermediate and Secondary level students were conducted. The questions asked by the interviewer are contained in Appendix II. The interviewer recorded students' responses in writing rather than on tape. In general, the purpose of this study was to learn something about the educational history of students at the Intermediate and Secondary level, to determine their reasons for entering LAAS, and to elicit their reactions to various aspects of the school. The results of this study are summarized in Section IX.

SECTION III

RESULTS OF STATE TESTING PROGRAM

At this writing test scores from the California state testing program were available on first-, second-, third-, fourth-, sixth-, and ninth-grade students at the Los Angeles Alternative School. In addition, the school office provided previous scores where available from school records. These latter scores are important because they give a longitudinal picture of performance in earlier years and at other schools, and also permit cross-sectional comparisons between grade levels within LAAS.

Nature of the Student Body

The student body at the school is not comparable to that of any other school in the district. Enrollment in the school was voluntary and the proportion of Black, Mexican-American, and Anglo students was deliberately balanced. Furthermore, there are other student characteristics, some verifiable and some partly speculative, which make the student body atypical with respect to any conceivable comparison group within any other public school in Los Angeles.

According to school records, 64 students, or 13% of the 333 names on the roster, were certified as gifted. This is doubtless an underestimate of the true proportion, however, since the actual student body was probably somewhat smaller than the roster total. The regular school attendance roster was used, and names of a few students who had recently withdrawn may not have been removed. Six other students, not identified as in the state gifted program, had individual IQ scores falling between IQ = 132 and 146. By including these students, but using the same total figure, the proportion of gifted rises to 21%. The impression among staff of the school was that the actual proportion of gifted students was closer to 30%.

Other unique characteristics of the student body are unfortunately more difficult to establish, but we strongly suspect that they exist. The information obtained from interviews of parents (Sections VII and VIII of this report) suggests that a relatively large number were and are dissatisfied with traditional schools in the district. The reasons given for this dissatisfaction often (though not invariably) indicated that their children had had unhappy experiences at other schools. From this fact it is not a long inferential leap to suggest that some significant proportion of the students enrolled at LAAS had experienced some degree of conflict or maladjustment in the traditional school environment. This inference was strongly supported by anecdotal evidence, such as information volunteered by staff members or parents about individual students, which is not suitable for inclusion in this report. Unfortunately, the actual number of students who have had serious problems with schooling simply cannot be estimated. Because of its sensitive nature, no attempt was made to interrogate parents directly on this matter.

It is certainly plausible to assume that people who are unhappy with traditional institutional forms will seek out alternatives. This fact, however, does raise an important caution when it comes to evaluating the school, and creates concerns about directions it may take in the future. If there is a significant number of children in the student body who have emotional problems relating to learning or who have simply developed a pattern of resisting formal learning, then this poses a special challenge to the staff. If such behavioral patterns persist in the new environment, the school's standing on such formal measures as achievement tests may eventually be adversely affected.

Moreover, if the proportion of the student body with emotionally-related learning disabilities increased overtime, as would happen if such students tended to remain in the school while students without such problems withdrew, then the character of the school would inevitably change.

Again, this is very much a speculative matter. But the senior member of the evaluation team has observed a public-supported alternative school in another state where exactly this process occurred over a three-year period. Parents who were primarily interested in open-structured education withdrew their children. Parents of children who had been expelled from other schools or who were simply unwilling or unable to attend traditional schools left their children in the alternative school. The staff, unfortunately, had not been chosen with this contingency in mind, and lacked the clinical and psychological expertise to run what had become a de facto clinic school.

The Cooperative Reading Test

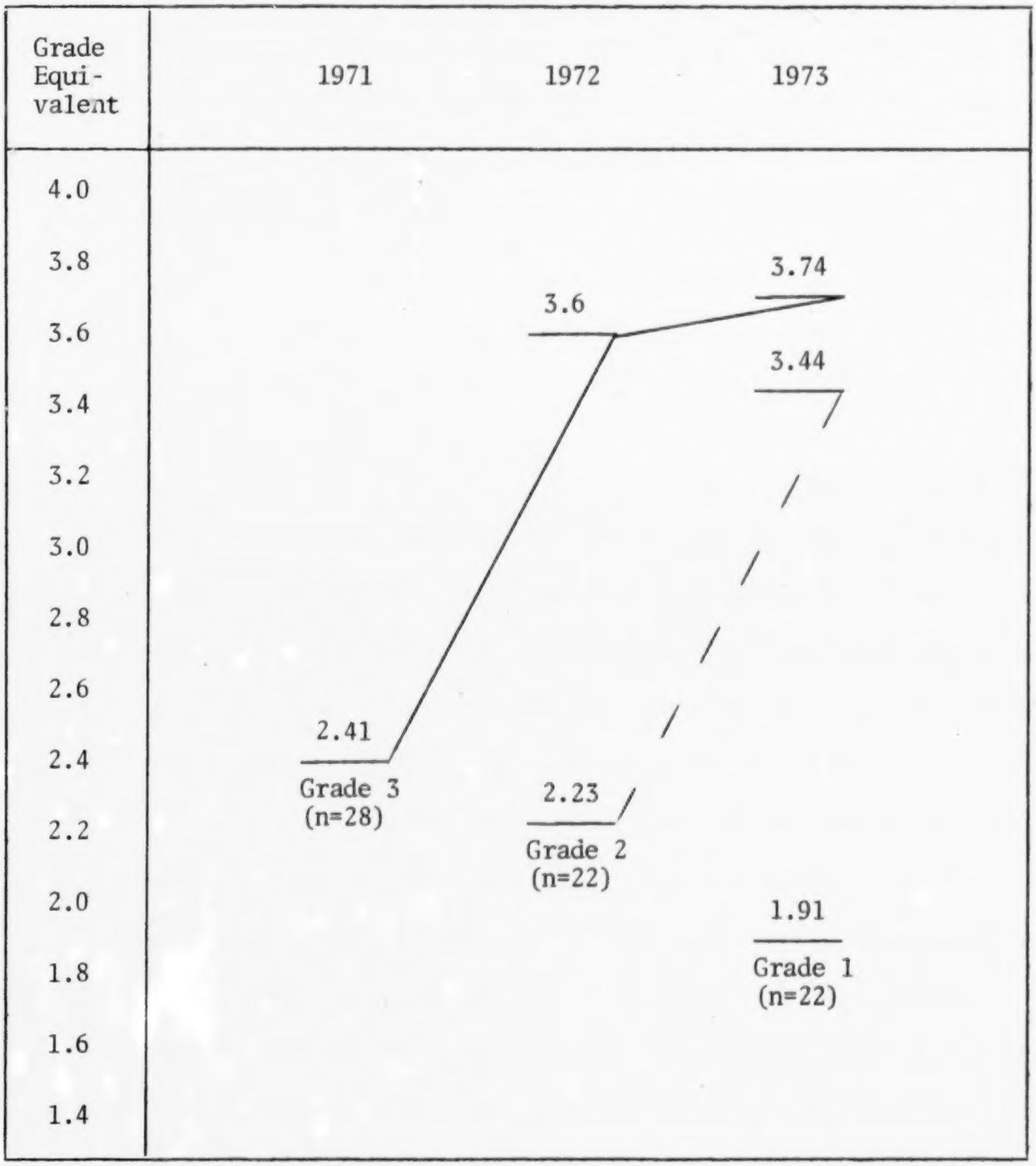
Cooperative Reading Test scores for 1973 were available for all third graders. Two of the 30 children at this level did not have scores on this test for previous years and were not included in the data presented below. One of the 24 second graders was not tested this year and one other was eliminated because the score was not available for the previous year. Two of the 24 first graders on the roster were not tested.

Table III-1 displays average grade equivalent reading scores for the three grade levels. The data in this table can be summarized as follows.

(1) There was very little gain in reading performance for third graders during the 1972-73 school year. Their average performance at other schools at the end of the previous second-grade year already placed this group at the middle of the third grade and there has been only slight upward progress since that time.

Table III - 1

Average *Cooperative Reading Test* Grade-Equivalent Scores for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Grade LAAS Students, 1971-1973



(2) In contrast, second-grade students made somewhat more than one year's progress during their first year at LAAS. While second graders did not score quite so high at the end of the second grade as did the present third graders, their performance at the end of the first grade was also lower and they would appear to have made as much progress at LAAS during the second grade as the present third graders made the previous year in their regular schools.

(3) First graders, taking the test for the first time, are approximately at normal grade level. The mean grade equivalent score of 1.91 is somewhat lower than that recorded for present second and third graders in earlier years at other schools, but is approximately at the norm for a test administered about one month before the end of the school year.

In summary, it would appear that students in grades one and two made normal or better than normal progress in reading as measured by the Cooperative Reading Test, while third-grade students progressed less than would be expected, but remained approximately at or slightly below grade level. It should be understood that different tests and norm tables are used at each of the three grade levels and that these trends can be taken only as rough indices.

California Test of Basic Skills

The CTBS is administered at the fourth and sixth grades. Scores on the reading portion of the test were available for 15 of the 17 enrolled fourth graders. The average stanine score obtained was 5.6, or somewhat above the median, but within normal range. The stanines ranged from 3 to 9, revealing that in spite of the high proportion of gifted children enrolled there are extensive differences in the reading competencies of fourth-grade children at the school. Seven of the 15 children at this level were classified as gifted. This latter group received an average CTBS reading stanine score of 7.1.

With nearly half of the students classified as being in the gifted category, one might expect the average reading score for fourth graders to have been higher. However, this level of performance is quite consistent with previous scores obtained by the group. On the Cooperative Reading Test in the third grade this group averaged at a stanine score of 5.28, with data being unavailable for one of the students in the gifted category. Although the tests given at these two grade levels are different, the comparison does not suggest any significant shift upwards or downwards in reading performance.

At the sixth-grade level the CTBS reading test was administered in the Fall and Spring. All 19 of the enrolled sixth graders took the test at the second administration. Scores on both occasions were available for 17 of these 19 students. The median score was at the 46th percentile for the Fall testing and at the 74th percentile at the Spring testing, certainly a substantial gain. Equally striking is the fact that individual scores ranged from the 1st to the 9th stanine at both testings, again suggesting that the school has to accommodate students at radically differing levels of achievement.

At the ninth-grade level CTBS reading scores are available only for the November, 1972, testing. Seventeen students took the test at that time, with a mean stanine score of 6.47 for the group. In contrast to results at the fourth- and sixth-grade levels, only one of the ninth graders taking the test scored below the 25th percentile. All other scores were at or above the 5th stanine.

Conclusions

Scores from the state testing program do not reveal any dramatic shifts from the students' previous levels of performance, with the possible exception of the third and sixth graders. The former apparently did not make normal gains in terms of grade equivalent scores, while the latter made considerable progress during the 1972-73 school year. First graders scored at approximately grade level and second graders made over one year of progress, remaining above grade level. Fourth graders scored at about the same level, or perhaps slightly higher, on fourth-grade norms as they did the previous year on third-grade norms.

In addition, striking individual differences exist in the student body at several grade levels. There are many individual instances of extremely high and extremely low performance in the fundamental skill area of reading. Group standardized test scores cannot be used to draw the line between literacy and illiteracy. However, the fact that scores were recorded at the very bottom of the distribution suggests that at several grade levels, including the sixth grade, at least some students entered the school virtually unable to read, and that little progress was made by these students during the year.

The fact that such extremely low-achieving students comprise a part of the student body at LAAS is another aspect of the point made earlier in this section that the student body has a number of unique characteristics. Certainly other schools in the district have children who are functionally illiterate at relatively advanced grade levels. But it seems improbable that such schools also have high proportions of gifted students, as is the case for LAAS. Moreover, the fact that at least some extremely low-achieving students were enrolled in the school should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings of later sections of this report, including those dealing with the instructional process and the reactions of parents to the school.

SECTION IV

OBSERVATIONS OF STUDENTS AT THE LOS ANGELES ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

If the criterion for determining the effectiveness of an evaluation is the usefulness of the information it provides, then an evaluation of the Los Angeles Alternative School cannot be based primarily on outcome measures derived from standardized tests. Since such a high proportion of LAAS students are classified as "gifted," average scores for the school should be relatively high in comparison with other schools. Further, since contemporary achievement tests are relatively insensitive to the effects of instruction over a fairly short period of time, the test results they provide are not so easily interpreted as would be suggested by their apparent objectivity.

The evaluation team was confronted with an alternative model for public education which has been effectively publicized in the larger community. There was bound to be widespread interest in the nature of the instructional process at LAAS. The team felt obliged to find a way to measure and describe what the students were doing during school hours. It was equally clear that such a survey must (a) be conducted in an objective manner, (b) be feasible in terms of our resources, and (c) result in summary information meaningful both to professional educators and the general public.

The need for objectivity dictated that the evaluation team itself conduct the observations rather than depend solely on information provided by teachers, students, and parents. Since behavioral observation is so time-consuming, this was clearly a major commitment of our resources. The need for objectivity also required that the procedure we develop for conducting the observations be systematic rather than merely impressionistic.

Two cardinal rules applying to observational studies in the classroom had to be taken into account within the limitations of the resources available. First, in order to draw conclusions about individual students it is necessary to make observations on those individuals repeatedly over a period of time. Second, the observations on each student should be made by more than one observer in order to compensate for possible individual observer bias and to permit assessment of the reliability of the observations. In other words, each student had to be observed several times by at least two observers. It was obvious that under these constraints the team could not expect to observe every one of the approximately 300 students in the school over a period of approximately one month. A basis had to be found for selecting a sub-sample from the total school for the observational study.

A Rationale for Selecting Students

One approach would have been to sample students on a random basis. However, simple random sampling of a small proportion of a population does not guarantee that critical sub-groups of special interest to the evaluation would be included in the sample. For example, it seemed desirable to separate the observations of children in the Core or primary program from those taken of students in the Intermediate and Advanced or secondary program, since the nature of students' activities in these programs differed sharply.

The evaluation team was operating under a theoretical model of schooling which did indeed pinpoint certain subgroups in the school as being of special interest. We refer here to Carroll's (1963) model of the school learning process. This model begins with the notion that most learners in elementary and secondary school can master the curriculum if they are given enough time to do so. The model stresses the role of individual differences among the learners. Its basic premise is that different learners will take differing amounts of time to learn the same material.

Focusing first on the learner, Carroll proposes three general categories of personal characteristics affecting learning rate. One is aptitude for school learning, which is roughly equated with general verbal intelligence. Another category subsumes special aptitudes for particular types of learning along with specially developed prior skills that may make it easier to learn a certain class of new material. The third individual difference characteristic, which is most important for the present study, is the degree of perseverence or persistence the student typically manifests while engaged in academic work. Other things being equal, the high-perseverant learner of a given aptitude will learn faster than the low-perseverant learner of the same aptitude.

The final two variables incorporated in Carroll's model are under the direct control of the school. First, of course, there is the quality of instruction, with all that is implied in that phrase. Second, there is the time allowed for learning. The model states that mastery will occur if sufficient time is allowed for learning in view of the quality of the instruction and the characteristics of the individual learner.

With respect to the students observed at LAAS, the critical aspect of Carroll's theory is that one of the individual characteristics (perseverance) is open to indirect manipulation by the school. If instruction is of high quality for a given learner, then perseverance on the part of that learner should increase. Instruction of high quality, in turn, is achieved by selecting material that is of appropriate difficulty, by taking the student's interests into account, and by utilizing the learning mode which best suits that particular student.

Carroll's model thus suggested an alternative mode for assessing the quality of instruction. Merely to focus on achievement outcomes is not enough, since even instruction of low quality could produce learning if enough time were allowed. The notion of perseverance as a characteristic of the student was the key to getting at instructional quality. We reasoned that the quality of instruction is directly related to the extent to which appropriate attempts are made to maximize the perseverance of individual students in learning.* High- and low-persevering students ought to be treated differently to ensure that the instruction is of high quality. If the instructional process available to students at different extremes on the perseverance dimension is the same, then in terms of Carroll's model the quality of that instruction is bound to be viewed as low. This reasoning led to a decision to observe and contrast high- and low-persevering children at LAAS in order to get a picture of how the instructional process was adapted to their differing characteristics as learners.

How many students could we observe? Considering the amount of time available to members of the team, it was determined that 16 students at each of the two levels of Core and Intermediate and Advanced, or about 10% of the student body, would be observed 10 times each over the span of about a month. The two groups of students would be further subdivided into eight high- and eight low-persevering students. Two observers would concentrate on each of the two groups, with each observer making five of the 10 observations.

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*Obviously, the concept of "appropriateness" is value-relative. At one time schools attempted to manipulate the perseverance of students by using birch rods and dunce caps. Modern instructional practice ostensibly prefers the kinds of techniques mentioned earlier, e.g., relating to the interests of students, utilizing optimal learning modes, etc. The value-relativity of the concept does not mean that the quality of instruction cannot be assessed. But the assessment should always be made in terms of an explicit value system. The very fact that some people hold non-traditional views on what means are "appropriate" for enhancing perseverance is one of the major reasons for the existence of alternative schools.

Selection of Students

Students at the Core level were selected by means of teacher nominations, using a "portrait matching" device developed for this purpose. Adapted from Guilford (1954), this technique requires the judge to match names of students against brief behavioral sketches arranged along a dimension of some trait, in the present case perseverance in school learning activities. The teacher/advisors in the Core program were asked to match the names of each of their advisees with one of five behavioral sketches, ranged from high to low on the perseverance dimension. The high and low categories are shown below.

High Perseverance Portrait

> This student will work alone for long periods of time even when the work itself is difficult and success is delayed. Projects and tasks are virtually always completed, often to a level or detail beyond that which was actually expected or required. Participation in group discussions tends to be "on track" in terms of the topic or task under discussion and behavior which disrupts the task rarely or never occurs. The student may often volunteer for projects and may also have personal interests which are consistently manifested in independent activities or integrated where appropriate into other learning activities. The student may be seen by others as a dependable source of help or information on activities relating to instruction.

Low Perseverance Portrait

> This student ordinarily does not finish a project or tasks without special urging or help, even when it is relatively easy in terms of the student's apparent ability and prior achievement. This student does not persist on tasks when working alone, and tends to interrupt group activities by talking to friends, asking questions, or making comments which are irrelevant to the task at hand. When the opportunity arises this student may tend to wander from one activity to another without engaging in any for long, or simply spend most of the time apparently doing little or nothing. This student may at times be seen by other students as frustrating the accomplishment of group tasks and projects.

When the ratings were returned eight high- and eight low-persevering children were selected. In this process it was decided to exclude kindergarten and first-grade children, and to concentrate on the second through fifth grades. Children in the two groups were distributed among the four grade levels as follows:

High Ach.	Grade	Low Ach.
2	5	2
3	4	2
1	3	2
1	2	2

In forming the final list an effort was made to assign boys and girls to each of the groups as well as to select children working with each of the four advisors at the four grade levels. The high-persevering group was made up of five boys and three girls, although one of the boys left the school before any observations could be obtained. The low-perservering group originally contained six boys and three girls, although one of the girls was so frequently absent that the single observation we managed to make was discarded.

It is worth noting that every one of the children assigned to the high-persevering group was found to be classified as gifted (mean IQ = 147). IQ scores were not available for most of the children in the low-perseverance group, but one of the children was classified as gifted and the other two IQ scores were in the normal range. In the sense that the high-persevering group was also higher in aptitude for school learning, these two groups thus turned out to be quite different on two variables in the Carroll model rather than on one.

Teachers at the Intermediate and Advanced levels, where more of the sudents work independently, did not find the portraits used with the younger children to be especially appropriate for the older students. Since no suggestions on defining perseverance were offered by the Intermediate and Advanced teachers with whom this matter was discussed, students were selected on the basis of their most recent stanine score on a state-mandated achievement test. It was reasoned that perseverance in academic work at this level would be reflected in achievement test scores. While this selection variable is inevitably confounded with aptitude, it was already evident in the selection of the Core sample that perseverance and general aptitude are correlated.

Students were selected for the high and low groups, respectively, primarily from the 1st and 9th stanines. Four of the children in the high group were classified as gifted. Both groups were evenly divided between boys and girls and roughly balanced as follows across the various grade levels represented in the Intermediate and Advanced program.

High Ach.	Grade*	Low Ach.
2	11	2
3	10	1
0	9	1
1	8	1
0	7	1
2	6	0
0	5	2

The Observation Process

Certain ground rules had to be established for the observations. Periods which were clearly not part of the regular instructional process, such as lunch periods, film and slide showings, etc., were excluded. Field trips, a frequent activity of the school, also had to be excluded, primarily for logistical reasons. Our intent was to view the regular, in-house functioning of the school. We also learned to avoid the first 20 minutes to one-half hour after school opened and a similar period before the school closed. It was agreed that at least one-half hour would be allowed to elapse between observations of the same student by the two observers. Ordinarily, however, the observations tended to be collected on different days.

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*Fifth graders are found in both the Core and Intermediate and Advanced groups, depending on their ability to work independantly.

The strategy used in collecting the observations had to be adapted to the nature of the school itself. There was simply no way in which we could be assured of observing "Johnny Jones" at 10 A.M. every Tuesday and Thursday morning. A pragmatic technique was utilized in which the evaluation team moved through the various regions of the school (large learning center room, science room, patio, two classrooms, games area, gym room, and arts and crafts room), and when we found a child on the list who had not been observed that day the observation was then made. Occasionally, when some of the children being observed were absent on field trips, two observations (at widely separated intervals) would be made on the same child. In general the observations were scattered over approximately one month. In a few cases it was not possible to obtain all 10 observations. When this was the case, the data were used, but were appropriately weighted for the number of observations.

The goal of each observation period was to stay near the student long enough to determine what it was that he or she was actually doing. After initial try-out it was decided that the minimum period of observation should be no less than five minutes. During the actual use of the schedule many of the observations took longer, with a few taking up to 20 minutes. In some cases this was because there was a dramatic shift in the nature of the activity early in the observation period and the observer had to begin again. In other cases it was simply not immediately clear what the student was doing.

While it was often possible to determine how the activity was selected on the basis of the observation itself, in other cases the student, the teacher, or both had to be interviewed.

The Observation Instrument

The LAAS Student Observation Schedule (see Appendix I) was designed after a series of informal observations of all aspects of regular school activity at the Los Angeles Alternative School. Our purpose was to develop an instrument that would facilitate the efficient categorization and recording of any type of activity in which the students might be engaged. The way in which the activity was selected was also recorded. Here, the emphasis was on whether the activity was self-selected, adult-selected, or peer-selected. A subjective rating of the intensity of the student's involvement in the activity was made on a three-point scale of "high", "moderate", and "low".

The content of the observation schedule was organized into several basic categories of activity. Formal academic learning activities comprised the most extensive single section of the instrument, with sub-categories as specific as "using instructional kit or package" (1.5), "receiving individual tutoring--aide" (2.2), or "organized discussion or meeting--content primarily 'academic'" (4.1). Production activities included art, handicraft, music, and other related activities. Recreational activities were differentiated into games with rules and free play. Categories were also available for conversation, with sub-categories such as "task-oriented vis a vis academic work" (7.3), and "non-task related" (7.5). Other categories included tutoring (cross-age tutoring is utilized at the school), seeking information or guidance, wandering, and passivity, non-activity. In general, the evaluation team found that almost all of the possible activities were covered, though at times an activity could be fit into more than one category and judgements had to be made about the category into which it most reasonably seemed to belong.

Observer Effects

One of our concerns was the possible reactivity of students and teachers to the experience of being observed. That is, did the evaluation team's repeated observations of individual students affect how those students behaved or, indirectly, affect the behavior of the teachers and aides associated with those students? We judge this to be unlikely.

In the first place, visitors are common at the LAMS, although the frequent presence of members of the evaluation team allowed us after a time to merge somewhat into the general context of the school activities. One of the members of the evaluation team (in spite of an initial resolution to remain a non-participant observer) eventually found several students coming to him regularly to talk or demonstrate something, was frequently asked if he was working at the school, responded to teacher's requests for help in moving materials, etc., and sometimes had to deal with children's requests for assistance or information.

Moreover, the team soon learned that it was possible to observe unobtrusively, especially in the crowded, sound- and movement-filled atmosphere of the Core program. The technique of observing without looking directly at the subject can be quickly developed, and observing several children at once is possible if the targeted student is in a group. Likewise, when determining the basis on which a given activity was selected, it was often possible to interview other students in the area as well so as to avoid focusing attention on the student in question. These techniques, however, were not as applicable with the older students, who inevitably became aware that they were being observed as individuals.

The teachers, of course, were also aware of which students were being observed. However, in no case did any of the members of the evaluation team detect any evidence that teachers were treating the observation sample any differently than other students or any differently than students had been treated all year. In particular, the teachers did not appear to attempt to make the low-persevering student "look better" by cajoling him into special learning activities. However, the strongest affirmation of this conclusion is found in the results reported below.

Results of Observations at the Core Level

For present purposes the activities recorded on the LAAS Student Observation Schedule were coded into three basic categories:

I. Formal Academic Study
II. Arts, Crafts, and Other Production
III. Play or Other

The specific coding for each category is provided in the Appendix I. In view of the results reported here, it should be noted that an effort was made to classify all academic-related activities in (I) above. For example, if the student was seeking information or guidance concerning academic work, then the activity was coded as (I) even though actual learning or study was not occurring during the period of the observation.

The observations for each student were classified in one of the three categories, thereby providing individual profiles. The results on individual Core students are summarized in Table IV-1. Frequencies of each of the three types of activity are presented as ratios of the total number of observations recorded for each student. Thus, the first student in the low-perseverance group, a second-grade boy, was never observed to be engaged in study activity during any of the nine observational periods.

Table IV - 1

Frequency of Formal Study, Arts/Crafts, and Play/Other Activities Observed in High and Low Persevering Core Students

Low Persevering				High Persevering			
Sex and grade of student	Study	Art/ Craft	Play/ Other	Sex and grade of student	Study	Art/ Craft	Play/ Other
Boy, gr. 2	0/9	5/9	4/9	Girl, gr. 2	5/10	3/10	2/10
Girl, gr. 2	0/3	1/3	2/3	Girl, gr. 3	7/10	2/10	1/10
Boy, gr. 3	1/10	4/10	5/10	Boy, gr. 4	1/10	2/10	7/10
Girl, gr. 3	1/5	0/5	4/5	Boy, gr. 4	6/11	0/11	5/11
Boy, gr. 4	1/10	2/10	7/10	Girl, gr. 4	2/10	0/10	8/10
Boy, gr. 4	0/10	3/10	7/10	Boy, gr. 5	3/9	2/9	4/9
Boy, gr. 5	3/10	1/10	6/10	Boy, gr. 5	4/9	2/9	3/9
Boy, gr. 5	1/10	3/10	6/10				
TOTALS	7/67	19/67	41/67	TOTALS	28/69	11/69	30/69

The table reveals that we were somewhat more successful in obtaining all 10 observations on students in the high persevering group than in the low. (On one student of the former group we inadvertently made 11 observations.) The reason for this discrepancy is simple enough. It was difficult to find two of the low persevering students (in addition to the student dropped from the study for the same reason). We fell somewhat behind on these two students and ultimately had to terminate the observations because the end of the school year was approaching.*

The most salient items of information in the table, however, are the obvious differences reflected in the activity patterns of the high-and low-persevering groups. Out of a total of 67 observations on eight low-perserving children, only seven (or about 10%) registered a child engaged in study activity. Out of 69 observations on seven children in the high-persevering group, 28 (or about 40%) found children involved in formal study. Other differences show a higher frequency of art and craft, play, or other activities for the low-persevering children. Indeed, the modal activity for this group is the "play or other" category. These results are summarized in Figure IV-1.

Before discussing the implications of these findings we should look at the same data for the Intermediate and Advanced students.

Results of Observations at the Intermediate and Advanced Levels

The instructional program at the Intermediate and Advanced level is not so closely tied to the school site as is the Core program. It was evident early in the year that the older students did not feel comfortable with the crowded quarters of the school and the way in which such crowding forced

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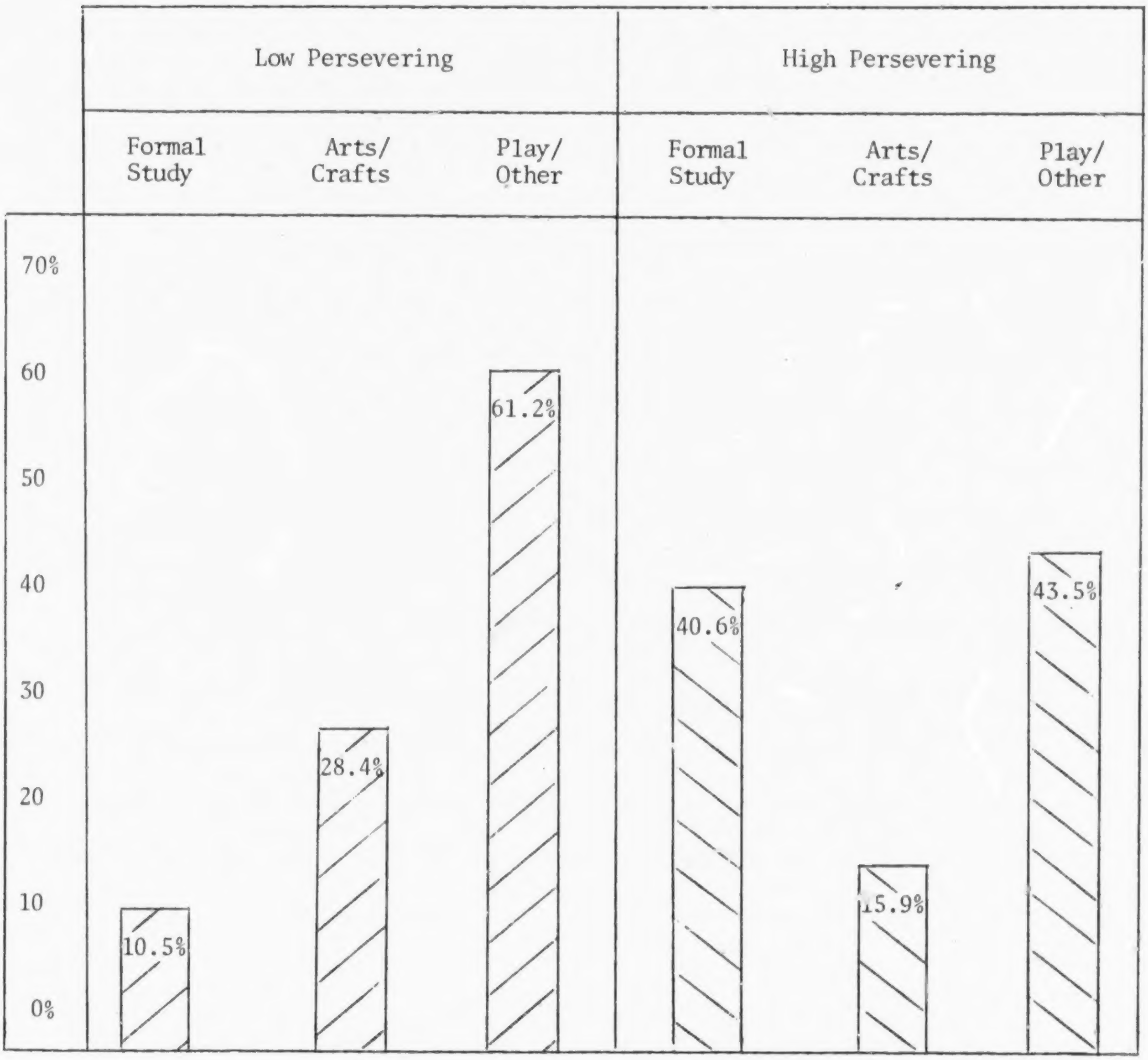
*Why it was so difficult to locate these two girls, even on days on which they had recorded themselves as present, remains a mystery this particular evaluation team did not resolve.

Figure IV - 1

Percentage of Regular School Time Spent by High vs. Low Persevering Core Students in Formal Study, Production/Artistic, and Play/Other Activities



them into constant contact with younger children. Inevitably, some of the instruction for older students had to be moved out of the school, sometimes to parent's or teacher's homes. Further, in the program for advanced students individual study was emphasized to a far greater degree than in the Core program. These kinds of factors made it more difficult for the evaluation team to form a reliable, independent picture of what the older students were doing with their time.

The observations reported below were collected at the school in the same manner as the observations made on Core students. Because learning may have been occurring elsewhere and at other times of the day, it is important to bear in mind what the data actually represent. Table IV-2 displays a frequency distribution of the number of observations of Intermediate and Advanced students by half-hour periods. Examination of the table shows that, with one single exception, all observations were conducted between 8:30 A.M and 12:00 noon, and that 97 (or 76%) of the observations fell in the period between 9:30 and 11:30 A.M. The data presented here, then, reflect what students in the Intermediate and Advanced sample who were present were doing at the school during the middle hours of the morning. In addition, observations were typically made during the first four days of the week.

Table IV-3 presents the summary data on individual students, broken down into the high- and low-achieving groups. In contrast to the Core study, where it was more difficult to obtain a complete set of 10 observations on the low-persevering sample, with the Intermediate and advanced students we had less success in obtaining 10 observations on students in the high-achieving group. This was counter-balanced by the fact that no observations were recorded for one of the low-achieving students initially selected and that only two observations were obtained on a second student.

Table IV - 2

Frequency of Observations of Intermediate and Advanced Students by One-Half Hour Time Segments

Time (AM)	No. Observations
8:30 - 9:00	8
9:00 - 9:30	13
9:30 - 10:00	22
10:00 - 10:30	31
10:30 - 11:00	23
11:00 - 11:30	21
11:30 - 12:00	9
12:00 - 12:30	1
	128

Table IV - 3

Frequency of Formal Study, Arts/Crafts, and Play/Other Activities Observed in High and Low Achieving Intermediate and Advance Students

Low Achievement				High Achievement			
Sex and grade	Study	Art/ Craft	Play/ Other	Sex and grade	Study	Art/ Craft	Play/ Other
Boy, gr. 6	2/10	4/10	4/10	Boy, gr. 5	0/7	0/7	7/7
Boy, gr. 6	0/10	3/10	7/10	Boy, gr. 5	1/11	0/11	10/11
Girl, gr. 8	2/2	0/2	0/2	Girl, gr. 7	0/7	3/7	4/7
Girl, gr. 10	7/10	2/10	1/16	Boy, gr. 8	3/10	0/10	7/10
Boy, gr. 10	0/8	2/8	6/8	Girl, gr. 9	1/5	0/5	4/5
Girl, gr. 10	0/10	0/10	10/10	Girl, gr. 10	5/8	0/8	3/8
Girl, gr. 11	1/11	1/11	9/11	Boy, gr. 11	1/10	1/10	8/10
				Girl, gr. 11	9/9	0/9	0/9
TOTALS	12/61	12/61	37/61	TOTALS	20/67	4/67	43/67

Examination of the table reveals that overall, the high-achieving students were somewhat more frequently engaged in study activities than were the low-achieving students, though the difference is not nearly so marked as for the comparison groups in the Core sample. Twelve (or 19.7%) of the observations of low-achieving students were in the study activity category as compared to 20 (or 29.8%) for the high achieving students. It is also apparent that the modal activity for both groups was "play/other", with over 60% of the total activities falling in this category in each case. These summary data are presented in Figure IV-2.

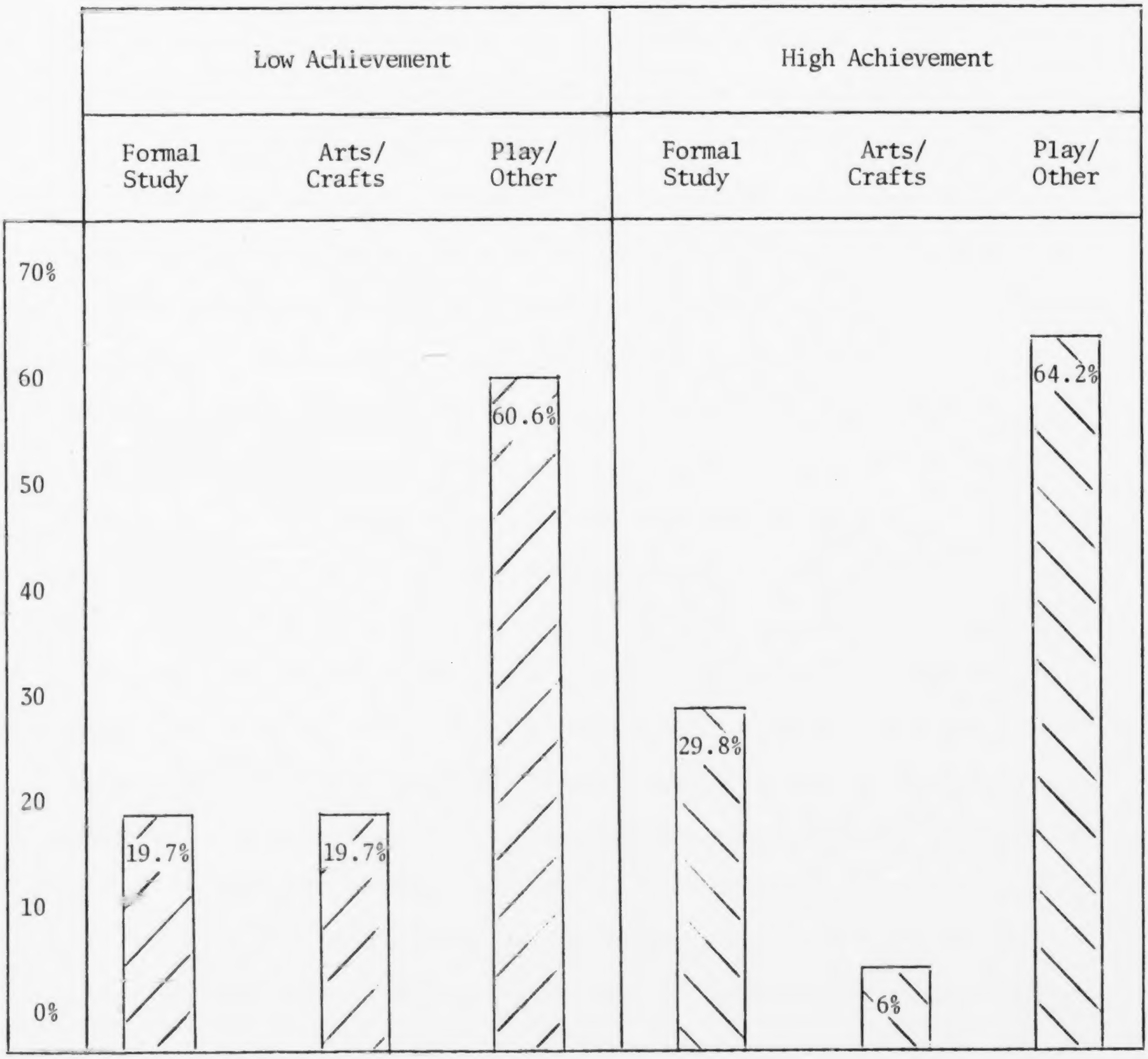
Summary data can sometimes obscure important details, however. Table IV-3 shows that one of the students in the low-achieving group, a tenth-grade girl, and two of the students in the high-achieving groups, both girls and in the tenth and eleventh grades, respectively, accounted for more than half of the study activities recorded for both groups. In effect, only three of the 15 students observed were typically engaged in study activities during the hours of the morning in which the observations occurred.

Discussion

For reasons stated above, while it is true that the observational data on Intermediate and Advanced students may not reflect the total pattern of student activity, the data do provide a picture of what students were doing at the school during the morning hours of the month in which observations were made. It should be added that the Core observations were begun on May 17 and terminated on June 13, and the Intermediate and Advanced observations began on May 16 and terminated on June 6. None of the observations at the Intermediate and Advanced level, and only a handful of those at the Core level, were made during the last week of school. However, it is conceivable that the entire

Figure IV - 2

Percentage of Regular School Time Spent
by High vs. Low Achieving Intermediate and Advanced Students
in Formal Study, Production/Artistic, and Play/Other Activities



last month of the school was to an undetermined degree atypical, with student involvement in study withering under the growing anticipation of summer/vacation.

Notwithstanding these qualifications, however, the primary conclusion to be derived here is that many of the students rarely or never engaged in study activities during the time and at the place where we were conducting our observations. This statement holds for most of the secondary school students (with three notable exceptions), for all of the low-persevering Core students, and even for some of the Core students classified as high-persevering.

In one sense, this conclusion is a documentation of the fact that the school has created the kind of atmosphere that many parents and staff members explicitly are seeking. The notion of freedom of choice for the individual child is a reality. There is the option to spend a great deal of time in study activities or to spend none at all. Given the latter decision, some of the children move toward other activities, such as art and handicrafts, where their involvement may be real and constructive, as appeared to be the case for one of the boys in the low-perseverence Core group, or they may choose to play. Students may choose the teacher or advisor they want to be with, and this freedom may likewise have some influence on the pattern of their activities, as some of the teachers and aides function as specialists. It was evident to the observers that the boy mentioned above, for example, very much liked to be in the physical presence of the arts and crafts teacher. An informal observation frequently made during this aspect of the evaluation was that some of the children in the Core sample spent their time almost exclusively with one teacher or aide. Ordinarily there was manifest evidence that these children had very warm personal feelings toward that teacher and that such feelings could be freely expressed in the atmosphere of the school.*

Similarly, students are free to choose their own companions. Peer relationships undoubtedly also had some degree of influence on the pattern of many children's activities. On a number of occasions students indicated in interviews that they were reading or doing something because another student had told them about it. Likewise, children who might be "split up for their own good" in a more authoritarian structure were allowed to spend their time together. In this sense, it is an informal but fascinating impression of the evaluation team that, given freedom to do so, children would group themselves more precisely in terms of similarity than could be achieved by the most competent psychometrist using the most accurate diagnostic test battery. At the Core level in this particular school such self-grouping was not based on racial or ethnic similarity; it was based on liking to do the same things.

But finally we come to the matter of interpretation. What does the central finding of this particular study mean? In this regard, the teachers at the Core level were interviewed about any of the children being observed with whom they were familiar. In all cases the teachers characterized the behavior of the children in ways consistent with our own observations. The dominant interpretation of the findings was also clear. In an atmosphere like that provided by LAAS, and given sufficient time, most children who were mainly playing at present would begin to want to learn. When they did the opportunities would be there.

Obviously, many readers will not share this interpretation. This is clearly not the kind of individualization with respect to the persevering/

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*The two observers at the Core level one day watched in fascination as one of the teachers managed to negotiate a small doorway while completely surrounded by a knot of children, all holding firmly to her arms, hands or clothing.

non-persevering dimension that would be taken as a sign of high-quality instruction under the Carroll model. The latter is very much oriented to what the teacher and the school do to get the student to learn at an optimal rate. The student appears as a passive object of other peoples' activities.

The interpretation given by LAAS teachers does, however, have precedent of note, being clearly derivable from the work of the British educator, A.S. Neill. According to Neill (1959),

> Children who come to Summerhill as kindergartners attend lessons from the beginning of their stay; but pupils from other schools vow that they will never attend any beastly lessons again at any time. They play and cycle and get in people's way, but they fight shy of lessons. This sometimes goes on for months. The recovery time is proportionate to the hatred their last school gave them. Our record case was a girl from a convent. She loafed for three years.

Neill's observations probably summarize as well as anything the school's expectations about the future development of its students, particularly those who are presently avoiding study activities. His observations also suggest at least two important questions for the evaluation that are not dealt with in this report, because they are long-term questions. The first bears on the future behavior in school of this year's kindergarten children, who have never experienced a different kind of school. The second bears on the future behavior of students we observed to be engaging primarily in non-study activities at present. These would appear to be crucial matters to be dealt with in future evaluations.

SECTION V

THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM FOR CORE STUDENTS

In order to obtain as complete a picture as possible of the nature and intent of the Core instructional program, all of the certified teachers and many of the aides at this level were interviewed. A few Core students were also interviewed, but they were not selected on a systematic basis. All interviews were recorded on tape and later transcribed to typewritten copy.

The intent of this study was to learn about the Core program from the point of view of the teachers and aides who designed and ran it. Questions asked in the open-ended interview format probed the following areas:

Nature of the instructional program

Philosophy of the school, in particular the concept of "responsibility"

Student/teacher, aide/teacher, aide/student contact

Preparation and duties of aides

Space utilization and associated problems

The information obtained from the interviews was supplemented by informal observations that members of the evaluation team made while in the Core area. Since several different topics are addressed in this section, an overal summary will not be included.

The Core Room and Learning Centers

The room used for most of the instruction at the Core level is the largest room in the school, running about the size of a standard basketball court, or perhaps slightly larger. There are no floor-to-ceiling partitions, although tables, boxes, and shelves are used to divide the space into several smaller regions, most of which contain learning centers.

About one-fourth of the space along the east side of the room had to be utilized as a passage-way between the Intermediate and Advanced science room and the small meeting rooms opening off a corridor at the north end of the building. This portion of the space was useless from an instructional point of view, and it also provided a prime source of distracting noise and movement. At one time construction materials were obtained for partitioning the remainder of the Core room from this traffic zone, but construction had not yet begun at the time the school year ended. At any given time there may have been from 50 to 100 students in the Core room, and during inclement weather the number was considerably larger.

The room was divided up as follows. The *Language Arts* area occupied the largest single space, and was further divided up into areas for *Reading*, *Creative Writing*, and *Game Playing*. The other three learning centers were *Science*, *Mathematics*, and *Social Studies*. The south wall of the room held bookshelves for the Core students. There were a few small zones contained by boxes and low partitions providing space for small-group work or play.

The Language Arts area appeared to have the most materials, including a variety of texts and general reading books. There was also quite a number of reading games, some of which were published materials and others which had been developed by the students themselves. The Science area was also well supplied with materials. Informal observation appeared to show that these materials were sufficient in variety and scope to meet most contingencies. For example, when some children expressed interest in electricity, an ample supply of batteries, bells, lights, and wiring was available for experiments. The Math area is similarly equipped, with many texts, manipulative materials (again, some of them locally constructed), and mathematics games.

In contrast, the Social Studies learning center seemed to be the most neglected. Unlike the other centers it appeared to be used infrequently and to contain relatively few books, maps, and the like, although there were some locally-prepared kits. One of these kits, for example, provided the student with a map of Los Angeles along with five questions to be answered, which were apparently aimed at the development of map as well as reading skills.

The largest group of aides in the Core room--five or six at any given time--was ordinarily found in the Language Arts area. The Math and Science centers usually had only one aide each and ordinarily there was no aide in the Social Science center.

The teachers reported that student's requests were weighted heavily in selecting or developing the learning materials. In the Language Arts center, for example, materials on poetry and creative writing were included along with materials on phonics, spelling, and vocabulary. Teachers' preferences were also considered, however. For example, one teacher, in describing how the Math center was set up stated:

> I decided to work as much as I could with manipulative materials and to avoid almost totally state textbooks, because I felt the younger children with whom I was working weren't ready to move abstract numbers around on paper.

This same teacher went on to describe her original intent of having a variety of materials, as well as clearly labeled storage spaces for these materials, so that the students would have easy access to whatever they needed.

The teacher's desire to individualize instruction was also clearly apparent:

> I was also setting up a log of job cards, proceeding from easy to difficult with different computational skills and check lists so the children could keep track of what they had completed by themselves.

It has already been suggested that interviews and informal observations revealed that much less attention was given to the Social Studies center.

The two teachers involved in this center reported that they had attempted to start programs on "pollution awareness" and "environmental concern", but found it difficult to get students involved or interested. It may be that the subject matter selected for social studies was not as conducive to individualized instruction.

Instruction in the Science learning center emphasized group projects, often on a spontaneous interest basis. One teacher reported that more stress had originally been placed on "classes". Group projects with live animals appeared to engage the students' interests most readily and to facilitate discussion about the project. The teacher reported that when classes were being held:

> The kids worked, they actually came in at a certain time and they worked in a group, they all did the same thing.

This was apparently no longer the characteristic situation in the Science center at the time the evaluation was conducted. Later this same teacher reported:

> Now I see them in the Science area and they're talking a lot, not usually about something directly related to science. There's a lot of verbal communication, but it's usually social and not curriculum oriented, unless it's animals.

A science project on earthworms provided an example of how students' spontaneous interests shaped the science activities. This project was not orginally planned by the teacher, but was rather initiated at the request of students who had seen the worms surfacing during the rains.

Summary: Teachers at the four centers rely heavily on the interests and motivation of the students. If the students show little or no interest, a project is dropped. In the case of the Social Studies center, virtually all activity ceased for this reason.

Given the above observations and reports by teachers, it is now appropriate to examine the instructional philosophy of teachers and aides, particularly as it relates to the notion of developing responsibility in the student.

Instructional Philosophy of the Staff

The views of the teaching staff about the process of teaching and learning have without doubt been the most potent formative factor in the school's development. The analysis of these views will depend heavily on statements by the teachers and aides themselves.

When asked about the process by which students learn, one teacher replied:

> ...learning is not a matter of a child receiving, listening, talking and having to repeat an answer to the questions I want him to answer. I don't believe in that type of education...There has been a lot of emphasis put on math...But my whole theory is that math is purely a device that we use to teach a lot of other things. Once the child knows how to learn, he could learn it in a relatively short period of time.

The above comment reveals that the teacher sought to avoid encouraging passivity and dependence in the learner. What is not clear, at least in this particular statement, is by what process the student "knows how to learn".

Another teacher, when asked about her feelings toward the fact that some of the students were engaged primarily in play rather than with activities in the learning centers, replied:

> It depends on the child. (With) some of them I think, 'great!', they probably need to do it for two years.... You really don't need to pressure them into doing a whole lot because then it's your decision and not their's and then the whole point is lost. So if they are not physically hurting themselves or anybody else, I guess I go along with it.

In view of criticism that some parents made of the school (summarized in later sections of this report), the following statement by the same teacher is significant:

> You have to consider what the parents are doing at home. The more pressure they apply, the less I apply, because you can't have pressure coming from both ends.

The teacher's empathy for the child caught in this sort of situation is understandable. Rightly or wrongly, however, from the perspective of the parent the teacher is engaging in a highly frustrating tactic. It is also conceivable that in some cases the result would be to increase the amount of pressure applied at home, which is certainly not the teacher's real intention.

One teacher clearly articulated the emphasis given to freedom of choice on the part of the student:

> The idea here is that the children choose what they are interested in learning. This is very evident when we are setting up new study groups ...They choose what they want to take and go to those study groups in their schedule. That's the big difference from another school. Another difference is that they don't have to study anything if they don't want to.

Finally, another teacher in effect defined the role of the teacher at LAAS as more of a "facilitator" than a teacher in the traditional sense of the word. The learning centers obviously play a central role in this approach:

> Actually, the center should function by itself, with just somebody there to offer assistance to the kids who need it. They become familiar with where the materials are, how to use them, how to keep track of what they have completed. They have individual folders, so they can function very independently.

How do the aides view the school? One aide, when asked about the goals of the teachers, replied:

> ...they're looking for student motivation and avoiding really heavy planning. I see individual relationships as the most important thing and the academic as just a way to set it up. We're looking for social interaction.

Another aide had a similar, though somewhat broader, conception of the schools' objectives:

> I can't really say that it's academically oriented... I think it's more of what we do in life, not so much reading, although we do have the center, but with other things...It's things we do in real life.

The statements made by these two aides are obviously not very precise in the sense of defining terms such as "social interaction" and "real life". However, what is important here is the suggestion that the school may view the academic area as a tool rather than an end in itself. The "real life" notion is undoubtedly reflected in the variety and frequency of field trips to various parts of the city and by the variety of classes planned around contemporary issues and problems. Perhaps the noticeable informality and warmth of relationships between staff and students can be seen as one aspect of the concern with social interaction.

Finally, an aide at the kindergarten level confirmed that the stress placed on individual responsibility extends to the youngest children in the school:

> They have to be more responsible for themselves... I have kindergarten. I'm here so that they can ask me questions. They know where I am...and can depend on me to be there to find them things...They know they belong at centers and that if they want to do something in that center, they have to initiate it themselves...

Summary: The Core program was organized around two unifying operational principles, both of which were intended to develop independent and responsible learners: (1) Students rather than teachers should be the primary initiators of learning activities; (2) Students should have freedom of choice about what they learn and how they go about learning it. Under these premises, the teacher or aide functions primarily as a facilitator or helper, rather than as an instructor or authority. Consistent with this policy, learning centers were designed so that students insofar as possible could utilize the materials there virtually without the involvement of any adult. The amount of time a student spends in a particular learning center or on a particular project depends on the preferences of the individual student. Informal observations at the centers suggested that some children spent as long as several weeks in a single center. Other children went to different centers daily. Some rarely spent time in any center.

Contact Between Teachers, Aides, and Students

The preferred role of the adult member of the teaching staff at LAAS was delineated above in a general, philosophical sense. It is now appropriate to turn to the specifics of teacher/student interactions to determine how that philosophy has been operationalized.

All students at LAAS were either assigned, or assigned themselves, to one advisor among the certified teachers. In terms of the formal organization of the school the advisor was responsible for helping students develop their academic programs, for monitoring decisions made by the student about study activities, and for reporting to parents on the student's general progress. Initially, the students were given the opportunity to select their own advisors, although for practical reasons the number assigned to each teacher had to be evened out to approximately thirty:

> After the first day they (the students) picked. They made a first, second and third choice. We (the teachers) had a big meeting and picked the ones we wanted. You find yourself really attracted to some of these kids who obviously had big problems in their other schools and you really want to help them.

The students were free to change advisors at any time, and many apparently did throughout the year. Moreover, a student's advisor did not necessarily serve as that student's teacher all of the time. sometimes the advisor had virtually no contact with the student academically, or in any other regard. This made the process of monitoring student progress an uncertain one in many instances. A teacher remarked:

> I have thirty advisees...I am somewhat responsible for their whole learning process. I'd like to be more a part of the overall instruction of them rather than in one specific area...I feel a sense of responsibility which I don't think I can fulfill under the present circumstances.

Depending on the particular teacher and student, the amount of contact between teacher and advisee apparently varied. When asked what she "...really knew about her advisees", the teacher quoted above on the initial process of assigning advisees replied that she really did not "...know any specifics". Another teacher noted the role of individual differences in the determination of how much attention various students receive:

> I think that some of the students get lost in the shuffle because of the size of the school. There's a lot of individual attention, but I think the kids who are quiet or the ones who just don't show up at the areas are really not getting the attention they deserve.

It will be apparent in the sections of the report dealing with parent interviews that many parents had come to a similar conclusion.

When one student was asked about the frequency of contact with the advisor, the reply was, "I never do talk to her, maybe once." On the other hand, two other students said they saw their advisors "frequently", as often as every day. A fourth student reported seeing her advisor once a month at the time her new schedule of learning activities had to be made out, but did not feel that more frequent contact was necessary. A teacher stated that she saw her advisees every day and was able to keep updated in a general way about what each student was doing. This teacher indicated that early in the school year advisees were seen daily in a group:

> The advising session in the beginning was a sort of family grouping...I miss the fact that we don't have it anymore...I'd like to see it once or twice a week...But thirty kids everyday...was too large a group for them to be able to communicate, so we did away with it, but we went too far.

It thus appears that a suitable system for assuring regular contact between teachers and all of their advisees was not achieved during the first year of the school's operation. Moreover, there is little evidence of systematic record-keeping on the progress of students which, in the view of one teacher, caused problems for parents:

> We don't have a whole lot written down. It's all carried in our heads. It should be a little easier to get to it (from parents' viewpoint) than always having to talk to somebody.

The teacher went on to indicate that some of the parents involved in the original planning of the school had expressed reservations about early staff plans to set up "activity sheets and learning goals sheets." These reservations were apparently based on concern about the de-humanizing effects of excessive labeling and quantification. However, the teacher remarked that with regard to the present attitudes of parents:

> ...now it's come down to hard core facts and they still want the specifics written down.

An aide saw the problem in the following terms:

> I think that one of the hardest things is just... trying to evaluate the progress of each kid. That's really difficult with thirty kids to each advisor and an advisor probably not seeing where a kid is all during each day. To really find out what he's doing, the advisor would have to talk to every person in the center...

Another teacher, describing attempts to motivate the children to keep their own personal records, said:

> I wanted the kids to keep records on their own of what they've been doing...It hasn't worked terribly well. Some kids do it, the older ones mainly.

It was apparent from other interviews that responsibility for record-keeping was often assigned to the students. While this policy is consistent with the school's efforts to develop responsibility, it also means that in many instances the advisor has no direct knowledge of what a given student is really doing, especially when the student did not frequent those areas where the advisor was working.

Summary: The school's emphasis on the development of responsibility was implemented in different ways by different staff members, but agreement on the overall goal was universal. Informal observations made during the study of the Core learning centers, as well as the formal observations reported in Section IV, revealed that some students seemed to function very well on their own. Most students, however, did not appear to demonstrate the kind of direction that might devolve from systematic diagnosis of their individual needs.

It appeared that the more outgoing and assertive the student, the more attention that student received. Some students reported that they had little contact with teachers, even when they were working in an area close to a teacher.

Interviews summarized in later sections of this report reveal that many parents were concerned about their children's progress. None of these parents expressed any interest in report cards or letter grades; they simply wanted to know what their children were doing. Unfortunately, record-keeping for the

Core program in general did not facilitate this type of communication. While many students were seen on a regular basis, in most cases once a week, the advising system itself did not necessarily provide a composite picture of all of the activities of a given student. Up to four or five teachers might have contact with a given student. Parents were not in a position to talk to quite so many teachers on a regular basis.

Utilization of Aides

The background of aides varied from no training or experience in education to completion of teacher training programs. Interviews of teachers and aides revealed that the aides began work without any formal preparation or guidance with respect to their duties at LAAS. The teachers themselves did not feel that this was the right way to begin, but reported that the brief period available for setting up the school to get underway simply left no time to deal with this need.

Involvement of aides in the instructional program depended primarily on their interests rather than on any formal explanation of what their duties were. Thus, one aide, working primarily with a single teacher, said:

> My duties are not laid out. Sometimes (the teacher) will make suggestions of possible things I could do, but I pretty much just came the first day and made myself at home..it would have been a little bit more helpful if I had been told something initially about the school...

Some of the aides were concerned with fulfilling their initial perceptions about their responsibilities, while others felt free to re-define their roles. Thus, the following statements were made by two aides:

> I stick around the reading area all the time. That's what I was hired for.

> I teach daytime astronomy classes right now. I'm supposed to be in the Social Studies center, but I pretty much float around, helping out whenever somebody needs to be helped out.

Some of the teachers, at least, saw the aides as primarily responsible for running the learning centers. One teacher stated:

> I would like them to sort of implement the materials and allow me to float around a whole lot, because kids are constantly asking me questions...if you can get an aide working with the group doing the activity, that gives me the freedom to do it.

Summary: In general, the interviews of aides gave the impression of a shared quality of enthusiasm. It was clear that the various aides functioned in different ways, depending on their own perception of the job and the particular teacher or teachers with whom they were working. Some aides were closely tied to a particular center, others moved about as their interests developed or the need arose.

A strong argument can be made for the notion that the presence of aides is an especially vital factor in the functioning of the school. With so many activities going on simultaneously and so many students of differing interests and abilities, an active and competent team of aides is needed. Without such help teachers would not have time to develop materials or to problem-solve on an individual basis.

Space Utilization and Associated Problems

Everyone interviewed made some comment concerning the lack of space. The basic problems associated with insufficient space included: (1) lack of space for students to store work in progress, (2) the virtual impossibility of finding places to study quietly or work alone, (3) difficulty in implementing projects that require the teacher's attention for longer than a few minutes, as a result of the generally distracting nature of the environment both to the teacher and to the students.

Specific statements by teachers emphasizing these problems follow:

> We are so limited in space there are not enough little corners where the kids can go to be alone. Because of space there is a lot of noise and sometimes it seems to interfere, although I think the kids are doing great. The noise doesn't seem to bother them at all. Their tolerance is terrific. But I just feel that we could use a lot more space for the centers. The teachers have a lot of great ideas, they just need more space.
>
> What I tried to do in the math center has not worked very well because there aren't rows of shelves where the kids can keep things, take things down and put them away. A lot of kids don't clean up because there's no place to put something. Everything is just on table tops, very little cabinet space. I find it very frustrating that the kids don't put away what they've used.

Summary: Observation of the school substantiated the teachers' concern about space. The fact that the Core room is in part a main thoroughfare for the entire school makes it even harder for students to find a place to work quietly. With the remainder of the open space un-partioned, it is easy for some students to interfere with the work of teachers or other students. The noise level is quite high, although some students seem to be able to concentrate despite such distraction. This ability, however, depends on the tenacity of the particular student rather than on any advantages attributable to the environment. In response to the problem, the teachers did develop some study groups which took some of the students to smaller classrooms.

SECTION VI

A DESCRIPTION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES OF THE LOS ANGELES ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

This section of the paper is divided into four parts: sources of information, observation process, findings from data, and discussion. The first part contains descriptions of the decision-making bodies at the LAAS and the manner in which information was collected on their processes. The second part describes the types of data collected, and the third summarizes the major findings. The final part of the section addresses alternative interpretations of these findings.

Sources of Information

Decision-making processes at the LAAS can be divided into two broad categories: the informal and the formal. Members of the evaluation team attended meetings of formal decision-making bodies and observed informal decision-making events.

Observations of formal decision-making bodies were begun on April 4 and ended on June 13. Observations were made of meetings of the following formal decision-making bodies: meeting of planning team leaders for the 1973-74 LAAS Proposal, April 4; Core Program and Planning Committee, once weekly April 24-June 13; Core Staff, once weekly April 24-June 13; Intermediate and Advanced Staff, once weekly April 24-June 13; Combined Core and Intermediate and Advanced Staff, once weekly April 24-June 13; two Town Hall Meetings; and five Coordinating Council Meetings. During this ten-week period over

80 hours were spent at meetings of formal decision-making bodies. An approximately equivalent number of hours were spent observing informal decision-making events.

A description of each decision-making body, formal and informal, follows.

Formal Decision-Making Bodies: The TOWN HALL is a large-group, formal decision-making body. A meeting of this group can be called at any time, and any participant in the school can attend. Students, parents, and staff are encouraged to participate in these meetings. While the Town Hall can make decisions concerning all areas of school operation, it acts as advisory group to the Coordinating Council, which is empowered to veto any decision made by the Town Hall.

The COORDINATING COUNCIL is a small-group, formal decision-making body, which ordinarily meets once each week at the school. The Council includes representatives from the three participating sub-populations--students, parents, and staff--and is the primary formal decision-making body of LAAS. Although the Council holds the ultimate decision-making authority for the school, it is advised by all other committees and individuals.

The CORE and INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED STAFF is a third formal decision-making body, which meets once weekly on-site. All staff are involved, including aides and volunteers. This group makes many of the housekeeping decisions in the day-to-day operation of the school, and also serves as a "bulletin board" or a place to communicate announcements. In general, this group acts within the policy set by the Coordinating Council and advises that Council. Separate meetings are also held by the two staff components comprising this larger body. The Core staff meets once weekly on-site, making the housekeeping decisions with respect to the Core program and advising the Coordinating

Council. Announcements concerning Core program functioning are made at these meetings. This same function is filled by the Intermediate and Advanced staff sub-group, which also meets once weekly on-site.

The CORE PROGRAM AND PLANNING COMMITTEE, which also meets once weekly on-site, is the final formal decision-making body at the LAAS. It is composed of Core staff plus one parent representative for each Core staff member. This committee deals with Core program and planning; it is like the other small groups in that it advises the Coordinating Council.

INDIVIDUALS may bring an issue before any of these formal decision-making bodies for a decision. However, individuals are encouraged to make their own decisions where they feel it will not restrict another's behavior against his or her will.

Informal Decision Making Bodies: There are no informal decision-making bodies that could be described as a large group in the sense of the Town Hall. First, there are the "FIVE STAR GENERALS", a name adopted by a small group composed of three credentialed staff members and two aides. This group makes many of the decisions which relate to the day-to-day functioning of the school. They also influence small group formal decision-making bodies by taking positions on issues under discussion by these bodies. In this sense, the "Five Star Generals" advise the other decision-making bodies.

From time to time, PARENT GROUPS form as special interest units to support particular positions on issues under consideration, and again advise formal decision-making groups.

The composition of informal STAFF GROUPS is determined by a variety of factors, including time involved with school, friendship, and a shared perception of problems that need to be resolved.

Each INDIVIDUAL is an informal decision maker, though decisions made by individuals are not always brought before a decision-making body. Individuals are encouraged to make their own decisions where they do not restrict another's behavior against his or her will.

Observation Process

Evaluation team members attending formal decision-making meetings regularly recorded certain basic items of information intended to describe the meeting and its participants as well as the content of whatever was discussed. This information included the following items, which were established in a memo distributed to members of the evaluation team to ensure uniform procedure.

(1) Date, time, (morning, afternoon, evening) and place of meeting.

(2) Ostensible purpose of meeting (e.g., what they say they are meeting about may be different from what actually occurs).

(3) People present identified by role (teacher, aide, student, parent, etc.) If it is a small group, try to get the names; if a large group, just describe in terms of relative proportions. In all cases try to get names of people who say interesting things so that we can interview them later if desired.

(4) Summarize actual issues discussed.

(5) Summarize conclusions arrived at as well as issues that are unresolved.

(6) If particular members of our team should pay special attention to any of the above because it falls within their area of responsibility be sure to so indicate.

(7) Any impressions or generalizations that you would care to make about the meeting.

(8) Process comments identified by content and speaker (e.g., "What are we deciding?"; "Let's get back together"; "I cannot hear with side conversations going on").

Findings

This part of the section includes findings from the observations made of the decision-making bodies at the LAAS. These findings will take the form of conclusions. Each conclusion is followed by supportive statements taken from the data collected during the process of observation.

1. Most meetings were characterized by lack of focus and indirect communication. Lack of focus and indirect communication seemed to go hand in hand. For example: At the Core Program and Planning Committee meeting on April 24 the first issue under discussion was the need for a chairperson for subsequent meetings of the group. The discussion was not continuous; during the meeting other issues would be raised; the discussion concerning the need for a chairperson was interjected between discussion on other issues. The result appeared to be that persons had varying notions about what the tasks of the chairperson would be. The decision to have a rotating chair was made; in practice each chairperson decides what his or her role includes.

Another example involves disruptive behavior on the part of meeting participants. Specifically, this disruption takes several forms. For example: At the Coordinating Council meeting on May 2 side conversations going on during a group discussion inhibited the listening of all members of the group. One person made the process comment "let's get back together". At times persons responded by coming back into the whole group discussion; at others they continued with their side conversations. The person making the process comments also said that he sometimes resented having to be the person who makes all the effort to keep the group on task. He asked the group for some help with keeping on task.

At a meeting of the entire staff on May 5 this same person said that he felt "alone" in "pushing through" the agenda. He asked, "Why don't others help?"

Task-irrelevant discussion was another sign of lack of focus. At a staff meeting on May 22 much of the discussion was of this kind. Consecutive points were made by three different persons: each point raised a different issue; none of the three seemed to connect with the previous remark. This sort of discussion often leads to a vague decision; occasionally one or two persons on the staff will ask "What are we deciding?" When this process comment is made the results are almost always more direct communication or in this case task-relevant discussion.

2. As a result of the school's attempts to democratize the decision-making process, there was frequent evidence of failure to delegate authority and to clarify the focus of the responsibility. Communications breakdowns were a frequent result. In the school's attempts to democratize the decision-making processes it was not always clear who was responsible for what. In writing the proposal to the Los Angeles Board of Education for the 1973-74 school year it was evident that committees presumably responsible for certain areas of the proposal (committee reports) did not all share the same status. At the entire staff meeting on April 24 one person announced that she had been treated unfairly since her report had been retracted from the proposal; she felt she had not been given due process. It was noted at this meeting that some reports were the work of individuals and others the work of committees. It was also decided that each report was subject to revision

by Coordinating Council. This decision was in fact a recommendation to Coordinating Council. This person's report was later re-entered into the final proposal.

The emphasis on democratization affected the decision-making processes themselves. With the year nearly three-fourths over the Core Program and Planning Committee was discussing the need for a note-taker and a chairperson. The result of the failure to delegage this authority often meant that decisions were not communicated and, in some cases, that action on those decision was not taken.

At the April 24 Town Hall Meeting the participants were confused as to what decision-making body had the authority to approve the next-year's proposal which was to go to the Board. Some parents believed that Town Hall had this authority; some staff believed the authority was vested in the Coordinating Council. The issue was unresolved at this meeting. At this same Town Hall meeting many persons were not clear as to who assumed administrative authority and who carried out administrative duties for the school. The staff referred to as the "Five Star Generals" were asked to describe their responsibilities; not everyone was aware of the role of these staff persons.

Informally, then, authority for most traditional administrative tasks was assumed by the persons identified as the "Five Star Generals". Ordinarily such tasks are assumed by the principal. The informal accomplishment of such tasks by these five staff persons was not commonly understood by all parents and students. This lack of communication resulted in parents "wondering" who makes the school work (see Section VII on parent interviews).

At times there were simply no communications at all. At the April 24 Town Hall meeting copies of the proposal to the Los Angeles Board were distributed to the participants for the first time (with the exception of some staff who prepared the draft proposal). In addition, no page numbers were affixed to the proposal, which resulted in confusion among members during the discussion of specific sections of the proposal. Only persons with a close working or writing relationship with the document knew where to turn for sections relevant to discussion.

Another example of lack of formal communication was noted in the staff meeting on May 1. The issue of the coordinator role was on the agenda for the staff selection committee meeting scheduled for May 2 at 3:30 P.M. The regular staff members of this committee were first notified of the May 2 meeting during the meeting of the first of May. Several of these staff were unhappy at not being notified sooner. Other staff had to cover for the regular staff members.

During the staff retreat several failures to share information were uncovered. One staff person felt that a colleague was not assuming a normal share of school responsibilities. This feeling was dealt with by describing exactly what the accused person was doing. Once this information was shared there was no ill feeling. One staff person expressed feelings of defensiveness towards some parents who have been opposing many of her activities during the year. Once her feelings were shared, the entire staff supported her. She responded by suggesting that the staff members as individuals need more support from the group.

At the Coordinating Council of June 6 the principal met with those attending the meeting. Questions from those in attendance revealed lack of comprehension on the part of many with respect to the actual authority or responsibilities the principal had this past year and those that he might assume in the coming year. The balance between the authority traditionally invested in the principal and the authority the Coordinating Council intends to reserve for itself is a delicate one. To maintain and further evaluate this balance, all concerned with the school seem to need more information and contact with the principal.

The area of authority and responsibility appears to be a critical issue in the future development of the organizational and administrative aspects of the school. A conflict between a small group of parents and some staff over the delegation of administrative tasks was observed in earlier meetings. The parent group favored one person accomplishing these administrative tasks; their notion of the role of the principal resembled that in the public school system, although, significantly, the job title selected for this position was originally that of "coordinator." The staff group favored several persons assuming the responsibility for these tasks: their notion was identified as a "team of coordinators." This conflict was dealt with in numerous formal and informal decision-making meetings.

While this issue was being resolved, the area Superintendent made arrangements for the then nominal principal of the school, who was also serving as the virtually full-time principal of a local traditional school, to spend more time at LAAS during the 1973-74 school year and to assume more responsibilities in its functioning. The school now had a principal rather than a "coordinator," and the possible significance of this fact was not lost on those who attended the June 6 Coordinating Council meeting.

The present resolution of this issue is that the principal's expanded responsibilities will incorporate most of the administrative tasks ordinarily assigned to the principal, but will exclude much of the leadership and decision-making functions. The Coordinating Council remains the principle decision-making body. The principal will facilitate the implementation of decisions made by school committees. He will manage the regular office paperwork and deal with school relations with the district and the community. In this latter sense he is to be a spokesman for the school. There was acceptance of this resolution among members of the parent group. It is not clear whether the implications of this resolution are completely understood by all participants in the disagreement. Plans for staff development and in-service training do, however, include a search for more direct communication among all participants at the LAAS.

3. Most persons at LAAS are aware of the problems encountered (e.g., indirect communication, delegation of authority) and are responsive to the needs inherent in these problems. A chairperson is now utilized at Core staff meetings. This person coordinates an agenda and attempts to keep the meeting on task. At the entire staff meeting on May 29 a staff person set an agenda as the first event at the meeting. One person identified agenda items and chaired the meeting. At this meeting a decision was made to set aside time next year for a regular on-going group to deal with group interaction process; it was the consensus that not enough time was set aside this year to deal with feelings of staff with respect to school tasks. It was also decided to investigate other similar possible experiences over the Summer for use in the Fall. The staff decided to plan a retreat every two months; at the retreat held this year many persons gained a better understanding of others' educational philosophies and feelings about specific events with respect to the operation of the school.

At this meeting two staff persons also volunteered to be a committee to foster staff development experiences which might lead to resolution of problems encountered this year.

The problems encountered were often identified in formal decision-making meetings; not much was actually done to resolve these problems as a group during the year. There is a search for alternative solutions to these problems, and staff development (as well as in-service training) is given a high priority by the staff. Needs for staff development will be treated separately, based on information obtained by interviews with the staff. This information appears to support conclusions from the observations of formal decision-making meetings.

Discussion

The discussion appearing at the end of Section IV of this report dealt with the general atmosphere of the school. That atmosphere was described as being one of reliance on individual initiative and responsibility, rather than delegation of responsibility through a formal structure of authority. This discussion may again be referred to since it is relevant to the findings of the present section as well as the findings of Section IV.

The deliberate democratization of the decision-making processes at the LAAS resulted in indirect communication, a lack of clear delegation of authority, and related problems. There are plans aimed at the resolution of these problems in the next school year. The set of problems associated with the attempts to democratize decision-making processes are not ordinarily encountered by participants in the context of an entire school. The school will continue in the Fall, and in this sense it has survived its first year. The problems discussed above are evidently ones the school participants want to avoid in the future. Plans for staff development and in-service training are aimed at dealing with these and other on-going problems; these plans include developing more student and parent participation.

While changes are obviously in the making, it is not entirely clear that the dilemma of choosing between the organizational alternatives of leadership versus authority, and assumption of responsibility by individuals versus delegation of responsibility, has been resolved or even fully appreciated by all of the active members of the school community. It was clear in the sections summarizing interviews of parents that at least some parents wanted to have a person or persons at the school vested with certain types of authority along with the organizational devices that accompany that authority. Others obviously did not. Clearly the staff did not. But the parental concerns, particularly of those parents dissatisfied with some aspects of the school, were understandably centered more on the instructional process itself, rather than on the purely administratively functions of authority.

In this sense it is important to note that the role definition for the newly expanded duties of the principal does not include leadership in the instructional area. This fact was made clear in the discussion at the June 6 meeting of the Coordinating Council, both by the questions posed to the principal and by the latter's response to those questions. The philosophy and method of teaching, the teacher's role as activist under the open-structured concept of education, or as facilitator under the free-school approach, are to be left primarily up to the teachers themselves, acting as individuals or through decision-making staff groups. The fundamental nature of the instructional process is thus not likely to change in the immediate future, although staff development activities planned for next year will undoubtedly have some impact.

The above discussion should not be construed to mean that the evaluation team is recommending that changes be made in the instructional process or that the school should move in the direction of authority and its attendent bureaucratization. However, the notion of leadership can be construed as an alternative to bureaucratic authority. And in several sections of this report it is apparent that the instructional process and the role of the teacher is a fulcrum in this very real dilemma.

SECTION VII

INTERVIEWS OF A SAMPLE OF PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN WITHDREW FROM THE LOS ANGELES ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL DURING THE 1972-73 SCHOOL YEAR

The Sample

In early May a member of the school's office staff provided a list of students who had withdrawn from the school up to that time. The 79 students on the list represented a total of 61 families. Thirty of these families were randomly selected and sent a letter explaining that a telephone call would follow and the purpose of that call. The institutional affiliation and independent status of the evaluation team were also described. Parents were assured that they did not have to respond if they did not wish to and that all information would be kept confidential. All interviews were conducted by the senior member of the evaluation team.

Ultimately, 24 of the 30 families were contacted by telephone. A few of these families, in addition to cooperating when they were called, also sent letters describing their own and their childrens' experiences and reactions to the school. Most of the conversations were with the mother, partly because about two-thirds of the calls were completed during daytime hours. We were unable to complete six of the planned interviews. In four cases the telephone number had been cancelled. In the other two cases it was simply never possible to contact a parent in spite of the fact that repeated telephone calls were made, including several which were made during evening hours. It should also be noted that five of the 24 families still have one child in the school. Three of the five parents withdrew the other child or children because of dissatisfaction with the school. In the case of these parents, their children are all at the secondary level, aged 13, 14 and 16 at the time of entry.

The Questions

Each parent was asked the following questions:

(1) Why was LAAS originally selected?

(2) What were your expectations about LAAS?

(3) What were the reasons for withdrawing?

(4) What kind of a school is the child in now?

(5) Would you make the same decision on withdrawal at this time?

As it turned out, answers to the first two questions often merged. Most parents, however, answered the first question, at least in part, with criticisms of the schools their children had previously attended. In the great majority of cases these criticisms were directed at various Los Angeles public schools.

The responses given by parents were recorded as written notes on a form devised for that purpose. These notes tended to be summaries of what the parent said, though in many instances direct quotes were recorded. All of the parents interviewed were cooperative and most seemed eager to offer their opinions.

Tabulating the Results

Answers to questions (1) - (3) above tended to incorporate several distinct responses. For example, usually more than one reason was given for withdrawing from the school, and ordinarily it was not possible to find out whether one particular reason was the determining factor for withdrawing. Further, where a parent had more than one child in the school, differentiations were often made between the reactions of individual children to the school.

In preparation for tabulation, each distinct response was given a number (identifying the parent and the sequence of the response) and categorized under one of five headings:

(1) Reactions to previous schooling
(2) Expectations about LAAS
(3) Reasons for withdrawing
(4) Type of school presently attending
(5) Would the same decision on withdrawing be made again?

The final tabulation involved developing sub-categories which could be used to summarize all of the responses in each of the five major categories. This was accomplished by reading the first response in each category, developing a sub-category for it, then reading the second response and developing a new sub-category if it did not fit into the first. This was continued until all of the responses were falling into prior categories.

Using this tabulation procedure, parents who made several responses to a given question have a relatively higher weight in the overall picture. However, for any given sub-category there can be only one response per parent. The percentage figures below thus refer to the percent of the total of 24 parents who made a response classified in a given sub-category.

Reactions to Previous Schooling

Statements involving reactions to previous schooling experiences were classified in five substantive sub-categories and a miscellaneous category containing six of the total of 33 responses. The results follow:

Excessive regimentation, rigidity, or repression: This was by far the most common response, accounting for 13 or 54% of the statements relating to previous schooling. One parent of a teenage girl characterized her daughter's former public school as "...more like a prison than a school."

Children had experienced learning problems in regular school: Six or 25% of the parents indicated that their children had encountered some sort of learning problem in their previous schooling. The nature of these problems varied, including difficulties with reading, refusal to study, and slow progress. A seventh parent, whose response was classified in the "miscellaneous" category, indicated that it had become extremely difficult to get the child to attend school at all.

Boredom: Four or 12% of the parents indicated that their children were bored in their regular classrooms. The dominant consideration here appeared to be that regular school work had been repetitive.

Conflict with previous school over rule violations: Two parents indicated their children had been expelled (at least temporarily) from previous schools for violating rules. In one case the parent indicated that her son had refused to attend gym class and in the other case the parent stated that a daughter had "wanted to write poetry instead of going to class." Since both parents were obviously resentful of the schools' actions, these two responses could probably be classified in the first or "regimentation" subcategory, meaning that over 60% of the parents in this group saw the schools previously attended as overly rigid and repressive.

Not enough discipline in regular school: In contrast to the above, two parents were seeking a more disciplined environment for their teenage daughters. Both girls were on probation and the school had been recommended by the probation officer.

Summary

More than half of the parents who cited experiences with previous schools as reasons for transferring to LAAS referred to the excessive rigidity and regimentation of those schools. A smaller group of parents cited learning problems manifested in their children. It should be remembered that these groups overlap somewhat as some parents criticized more than one aspect of schools previously attended.

Expectations about the Los Angeles Alternative School

Expectations about LAAS were classified into six substantive subcategories plus a miscellaneous category.

Open-structured classroom including individualization based on working at own rate and following own interests: Ten or 42% of the parents indicated that they were seeking a school which had "open-structured" learning experiences. Since this term has become part of current educational jargon, the interviewer asked for examples of definitions whenever it occurred. In these cases parents responded by citing more concrete examples such as "individualization of instruction", "learning at his own rate", or following the child's own "interests".

In view of the reasons given for withdrawing from LAAS reported below, it is significant that all of the examples or definitions of open-structured education provided by the parents emphasized formal learning occurring in a certain type of instructional process. Qualitatively, this particular group of parents especially impressed the interviewer with their knowledge of and ability to articulate contemporary educational ideas. But their interest in the school centered on the nature of the instructional process itself. They initially expected that the school would have a philosophy of how to instruct and that the teachers would be activists within the boundaries of that philosophy.

Children would be able to make more of their own decisions and become more independent as learners: Nine or 38% of the parents emphasized the importance of allowing children to make their own decisions. (It is very important to note here that as far as the school staff is concerned, the desire to develop independent, self-motivated learners remains perhaps the primary goal of the school.) The responses in this category, those in the previous sub-category, and those in the one that follows are quite consistent with the dominant perception held by these parents of the traditional school as rigid and repressive. An analysis of the reasons for withdrawing will make it clear that the manner in which the school set out to develop independence in the learners was a major factor in bringing about withdrawals from the school, in part because it conflicted inexorably with these parents' notions about open-structured education.

There would be a more varied curriculum and a variety of different types of learning opportunities: Seven or 29% of the parents expected a "richer" (though none used the term) or more varied curriculum. Again, this is in part a reflection the parents' tendency to view the regular public school as rigid and tradition-bound.

More attention would be paid to the individual child and classes would be smaller: Four or 12% of the parents expected more individual attention for their children at LAAS. These responses might be classified in the first or "open-structure" category since they imply a perceived need for individualization. This suggests that perhaps over 60% of the parents in this group were seeking at least one important aspect of open-structured education, though somewhat less than half clearly articulated the concept.

Other: Responses occurring once or twice indicated approval of the idea of having a wider age-range in the school as well as an ethnic mix; expectations that teachers and fellow students would be of high quality; that there would be an opportunity for parents to participate in the school; and that creativity would be encouraged.

Summary

Dominant expectations about the school on the part of parents whose children have been withdrawn centered on an open-structured educational process, the chance for children to learn to make their own decisions so as to become independent learners, and the hope for a more varied and interesting curriculum than is available in traditional public schools.

Reasons for Withdrawing from the School

Not surprisingly, most parents tended to go into considerable detail when asked why their children had withdrawn from the school. The 24 parents produced a total of 87 separate responses in this category. It should be said at the outset that not all of the reasons for withdrawal reflected negative judgements about the school. A few parents, in fact, viewed the school quite positively. This sub-category of parents will be discussed first.

Non-negative reasons for withdrawal: Six of the parents cited reasons for withdrawal which were in no way criticisms of the school or its programs. Of these, one "withdrawal" was in actuality a mid-year graduation. This parent also had a younger child in the school who would definitely be re-entered next year. One other parent, also with a child still enrolled, reported that the child who had withdrawn had gone to live with relatives in another state for a year and would return to LAAS in the Fall. The other four of the six cited commuting problems as the major reason for leaving. Two of these, however, generated criticisms of the school which make their emphasis on transportation problems somewhat hard to interpret. One indicated that the children had asked to be transferred and that, among other things, there was little evidence of progress in learning. The other reported that two of the three children who had been in the school appeared to be making no progress. A third, whose children were enrolled for only three weeks, reported that there had not been enough time to evaluate the school.

We now turn to sub-categories representing criticisms of the school.

Too much responsibility for learning placed on the child with insufficient concern on the part of teachers with the child's learning: Seventeen or 71% of the parents indicated rather strong dissatisfaction with the school based on their perception that the decision about whether to study and what to study had been left up to the child. In this regard, several parents indicated that they had expected an "open-structured" school and instead had met with a "free" school. Several of these parents also gave more than one response in this sub-category, although multiple responses by a parent within a given sub-category were counted as a single response, as was previously indicated.

Because the concern about leaving too much up to the child is so dominant among this group of parents, a few examples of these concerns are listed below. Most were taken from the notes made during the interviews. One was taken from a letter which was voluntarily submitted by one of the parents.

> It is my opinion that the staff (both elementary and secondary) is more concerned with their personal freedom than with the needs of the students.

> They said, 'It's up to the child to plug in.' ...They had developed a free school.
>
> (The) child couldn't cope with the lack of structure. . . was left to his own devices.
>
> The school felt if he was not ready to learn they would leave him alone.
>
> Nobody cared. . . she would feel ignored and did well only in the art center and gymnastics.
>
> It was a free school rather than an open school.
>
> He was not willing to put himself forward and attract the advisor's attention.

These are strong statements and many more like them could be cited. To maintain proper perspective, however, the next section shows that there are parents who are equally aware of the passive stance taken by the teachers with respect to getting children to study, and whose children remained in the school because parents approved of this approach and feel that it has been good for their children. As a matter of fact, the last of the statements cited above was made by a parent who had withdrawn only one of the two children originally enrolled in the school; the parent expressed enthusiasm about the other child's reaction to the school and definitely planned to re-enter that child in the Fall.

Nevertheless, we are still confronted with the fact that a sizeable majority of parents who had withdrawn their children (sometimes reluctantly and only at the child's insistence) perceived the school as unwilling to make direct attempts to motivate the child to learn, often to the extent of virtually ignoring the child. This is an important finding. It is obviously consistent with the conclusions in Section IV based on actual observations of students at the school.

No evidence child was doing academic work and concern by parent or child about falling behind: Eleven or 46% of the parents felt that their children were doing an insufficient amount of academic work. As a matter of fact, most of these parents had the impression that their children were not doing any work at all. Frequently, it was the child who reported this voluntarily, and several children actually asked to leave the school because they were worried about falling behind. One parent quoted a ten-year old child as saying, "I am not going back tomorrow. I am getting dumber rather than smarter." A 14 year old boy was described as, ". . . sort of lost and worried about being left behind."

One might wonder how it is that children who were motivated enough to worry about their own lack of progress did not find a way to engage in learning activities. There are various reasons which may explain this phenomenon, some of which are dependent on the individual student. Some of the possibilities are:

(1) The student may have been unwilling or unable to approach the advisor for help. (See quotation in the previous category.)

(2) The student may have been unable to concentrate in the crowded, sometimes chaotic atmosphere of the school building. (See the following sub-category.)

(3) The advisor may have been waiting for the child to make up his or her own mind about what was to be learned and avoided telling the child what to do because of the school's emphasis on the development of responsibility.

(4) The child (if older) may have gone to classes and found that they had been cancelled or were simply not meeting. (See later sub-category on organization.)

It is not surprising that where a majority of a group of parents saw teachers as failing to adopt an active role in involving children in learning, many of these same parents expressed concern that the child was learning nothing.

The atmosphere of the school was noisy and chaotic: Nine or 38% of the parents criticized the school for being noisy or otherwise disorderly. One parent saw the problem as caused by lack of space. She emphasized that she liked the school and its staff, but indicated that her 8 year old boy, ". . . couldn't work in the confusion." Another parent who expressed approval of the idea of the school indicated that her son, ". . . couldn't stand the noise or find a place to study." The majority, however, attributed the noise and disorder to lack of discipline and supervision. Thus, one parent on a visit to the school, ". . . saw a teacher telling some kids to stop making noise but then not doing anything about it when they didn't." Another parent reported that a group of parents had met with school staff in November after an incident at the school and asked that something be done about discipline. The parent reported that nothing was accomplished after one of the staff members, ". . . maintained that there was no discipline problem.'

Again, in the interest of a balanced perspective, it should be recalled that the observations reported in Section IV revealed that some children were able to study, noise notwithstanding.

The school was administered in a disorganized and ineffectual manner: Eight or 33% of the parents expressed frustrations over organizational issues such as the lack of anyone in authority, poor communication of decisions made by the governing bodies of the school, and failure to carry through on plans. This topic is dealt with extensively in another section of this report. Briefly, the views of individual parents include the following:

> (The) organization was incredibly poor. Teachers were often not at the Centers.
>
> A structure did not develop. Parents were sometimes at odds with the school. There was no leader, no one to carry through.

Other classes of responses, being less frequent, will be reported only briefly.

There was insufficient space at the school: While only five or 21% of the parents made this comment, one would surmise that all parents would have agreed that the facilities were seriously over-crowded. This particular group of parents was obviously concerned with other matters. Only one parent out of the 24 tied lack of space to the disorder that prevented her child from studying.

The school and its grounds were allowed to become dirty and littered: Four of the parents complained that the children were allowed to litter excessively. One of these parents felt this practice was inconsistent with aspects of the curriculum concerned with ecology.

There was disruptive or violent behavior on the part of some children: Five of the parents cited instances of aggression or other disruptive behavior. One has the impression, at least, that this kind of behavior was more of a problem early in the school year and that certain children prone to such behavior may have, in the school's term, been "counselled out." No formal study was made of this process and the school staff was still grappling with the problem of sanctions for disruptive behavior during the period of the evaluation. Three of the parents concerned over this subcategory complained about the aggressive behavior of some of the older black students. One of these parents indicated concern that her daughter, formerly in an integrated "middle-class" school, was developing prejudices toward blacks. (There was apparently a certain degree of socio-economic as well as racial/ethnic integration in the LAAS student body.)

Children complained of being bored: Five of the parents indicated that their children had reported being bored while at school.

Other parent responses that were given from one to three times can simply be listed here.

Not getting feedback on child's progress.

Child wanted to stay home and withdrew from all activity while at the school.

Child desired to return to friends at old school.

Children of too widely disparate ages were kept together.

Inability of parents to have sufficient influence on the school. (One cannot help but speculate that, had this last question been asked directly, more than a few parents would have answered in the affirmative. From the comments of many parents interviewed, one can perhaps infer that this was the case. However, for obvious reasons, the data tabulated for this section were based on direct statements rather than inferences.)

Would the same decision be made again?

At the time of the interview, 16 of the 24 parents indicated they would definitely make the same decision on withdrawing their children. Another five were uncertain. Two of these had withdrawn their children for reasons other than dissatisfaction and indicated they had had insufficient time to come to a firm opinion about the school. Two parents stated that the child (secondary level in both cases) might want to give the school another try. One parent had heard that the school was becoming more "structured" and would consider re-entry if this was the case. The son of one of the two remaining parents had graduated and the remaining parent intended to re-enter her son when he returned from out of state.

Interpretation

Early in this section it was pointed out that the expectation about the school most frequently cited by parents who had withdrawn their children involved the notion of "open-structured" education. Typical characteristics of the latter mentioned by parents included individualization in terms of learning rates, interests, and approach to instruction. It is extremely important to recognize that this view of open-structured education sees the teacher playing an active role in getting children to engage in learning activities. It is also quite compatible with high-quality instruction in terms of Carroll's (1963) model of the school learning process, which was discussed briefly in Section IV. It is clear that a sizeable proportion of parents who had withdrawn their children were dissatisfied because teachers were not taking this kind of active role.

In the view of the senior member of the evaluation team this finding reveals a most significant schism in the early development of the school. The conflict of values between advocates of activist, open-structured teaching and learning, and those who favor the free-school approach of waiting for the child to begin to seek out the learning opportunities available has been, and remains, a decisive factor within the school. (This conflict will also be evident in the next section.) One cannot help but suspect that this same value conflict will be encountered by other alternative schools in the district and by the alternative school movement in general.

It was pointed out in the previous section on organization (see Section VI) that there is recognition of this problem among parents and staff. Plans for increased supervision and greater direct contact between teachers and students have already been accepted by the Coordinating Council and the Core Program and Planning Committee.

But why must this conflict exist? Again, we have an important clue in the expectations about the school reported earlier in this section. The school, and many of its parents, also wanted to develop self-motivated and self-responsible learners. The device used by the instructional staff to achieve this end has been to place the responsibility of choosing to learn on the children themselves. As a tactic for developing responsibility, this approach is quite incompatible with the active, structuring role taken by the teacher in contemporary models of open education.

It appears, therefore, that the way in which one major goal of the school was implemented frustrated what was, for a significant number of parents, a primary expectation about the nature of the instructional process.

The evaluation team, finally, has the impression that the notion of placing individual responsibility on the learners was one aspect of a more encompassing value held by the staff. The criticisms which some parents made about lack of authority and organization deriving from such authority--or as one parent put it, no one on the staff "being in a position to tell anyone else what to do"--suggests that the staff felt that adults in the school should also assume responsibilities on their own, without being told to so so by anyone else empowered to apply sanctions for non-compliance. This broader notion of individual responsibility being substituted for external authority, if one wishes to so apply it, is very helpful in reaching an understanding of why the Los Angeles Alternative School assumed the form that it did. It can also be seen to form the basis of policy questions that the school is attempting to resolve. This was also apparent in Section VI on organization.

SECTION VIII

INTERVIEWS OF PARENTS OF ENROLLED STUDENTS

Parents of children in the Core and Intermediate and Advanced observation samples (see Section IV) were informed by mail that members of the evaluation team would contact them by telephone concerning parents' experiences with the school. These parents were informed of the independent status of the evaluation team and assured that they were under no obligation to consent to the interview. No parents declined to be interviewed.

The Questions and Interview Process

Each parent contacted was asked five questions. The interviews of Core parents were recorded in note form, occasionally including direct quotations. Interviews of parents of Intermediate and Advanced students were recorded on tape after obtaining the parent's consent. The questions follow:

(1) What reasons led you to enter your child in LAAS?

(2) In what ways has the school met your expectations or your child's expectations?

(3) Are there ways in which the school has not met your or your child's expectations?

(4) What has your child been learning?

(5) Do you plan to re-enter your child (or children) in the school next year?

Since the interviewers had observed at least one child in each family repeatedly at the school, it was inevitable that by the time the parent was contacted certain impressions would have been formed about that child's typical mode of activity during school hours. In no case, however, were such prior impressions allowed to influence the questions that parents were asked, nor were they used to contradict the parents' own impressions of a child. While this aspect of the data has not yet been analyzed, it was clear in some cases that the parent and the interviewer had very similar conclusions about the child's behavior at the school. In other cases the impressions held by the two parties were distinctly different.

Several parents asked whether or not the interviewer had ever observed their children at the school. When this occurred an affirmative answer was given. However, the fact that the observations were being made systematically rather than casually was not mentioned, partly in the interest of keeping the interviews to a reasonable length and partly to avoid usurping the school's own function of reporting on student progress.

The interview material was analyzed in the manner described in the preceding section. Answers to the first question concerning reasons for entering LAAS were categorized in terms of earlier experiences with traditional public schools or expectations about LAAS. Responses to the other four questions were left in single categories. As in Section VII, each of the resulting six major categories was divided into sub-categories so that individual responses could be classified and tallied.

Results: Core Sample

Parents of 12 of the 14 children in the Core sample were eventually contacted. In the case of the two exceptions, the telephone number of one family was not available, and for the other the number had been changed. Both of the children whose families were not contacted were members of the "low-persevering" group (see Section IV).

Since the total number of interviews of Core parents is relatively small, raw frequencies rather than percentages are reported.

Criticisms of Previous Schools' Excessive Regimentation, Rigidity, or Repression

Three of the parents indicated that their children had been generally unhappy with previous school. None of the parents tied the child's negative reaction to any particular school feature.

Other responses in this sub-category occurred only once or twice, and are simply listed below. It should be noted that two of the parents specifically stated that they did not object to the traditional school. One parent tried LAAS out of curiosity, while another felt that the school might have something special to offer one of her three children. Other responses included:

Children had learning problems or were not doing well
Parent unable to exert influence on program at regular school
Concern about how child would respond to Junior High
Desire to avoid assignment to a particular teacher at old school

This group of parents with children enrolled, like the parents of children no longer enrolled in the school, tended to be critical of one or more aspects of the traditional public school. In fact, 10 of the 12 parents spontaneously registered one or more such criticisms. However, unlike the parents who had transferred their children out of the school, the criticisms voiced by this group did not fall primarily in one or two sub-categories.

Expectations About the Los Angeles Alternative School

Expectations about the school held by this group of parents also paralleled those of parents who had withdrawn children from the school.

Open-structured education: Seven of the 12 parents expressed a clear preference for open-structured education in terms similar to those used in the previous group (individualization, learning at own rate, etc.)

Accelerated academic progress: Three of the parents expressed hopes for faster academic progress. Responses given by at least two parents included:

Children would learn to make own decisions independently
Children would enjoy the school
Curiosity about results (no special expectation)

How LAAS Has Met Parents' Expectations:

Parents indicated a number of ways in which the school had met their expectations. One stated that the school did not meet any prior expectation, but that the child did enjoy attending.

Child responding well to school: Five of the 12 parents spoke in general terms of their satisfaction with the child's reaction to the school. When queried as to specifics the response varied somewhat, but still dealt with generalities such as "working well" or "likes going to the school".

Child obtaining new experiences: Four of the parents cited new experiences, especially the curriculum and contacts with different types of people, as meeting their expectations. Two other parents also expressed approval of cross-age grouping at the school, which could possibly fit in the new experiences subcategory as well.

Liking teachers in the school: Three parents expressed particular approval of the personal qualities of teachers at the school. Responses given by two parents included:

Child more self-confident and out-going with adults
Child more able to make own decisions.

A number of the parents expressed very positive comments about the school. One father said, "I can't conceive of sending the boy back to regular school".

It is interesting, however, that none of the parents specifically mentioned any clearly defined facet of open-structured education as a characteristic of the school, in spite of the fact that over half had cited it as a prior expectation. This finding is consistent with the perceptions (discussed in Section VII) of parents who had withdrawn their children largely because the conception they had of open-structured education had not been implemented.

How LAAS Did Not Meet Expectations of Parents

The largest number of responses were given in this category with some parents citing several criticisms. This is somewhat surprising, since the majority of these parents planned to keep their children in the school. The response varied considerably in type.

Lack of academic structure in sense of supervision and teacher-pupil contact: Six of the 12 parents reported that there was insufficient help or supervision by teachers. Again, this appears to be a reaction to a perceived passivity on the part of teachers toward "drawing the kids out", as one parent put it.

Child not doing sufficient academic work: Five of the 12 parents reported that their children were not doing enough academic work. For some, however, this was clearly not of particular concern for the present year. For example, one parent indicated that the school had not produced the "crushing experience of failure" previously encountered by the child.

Too much noise, disruption, and confusion: Four of the parents complained about noise and confusion. This concern was also expressed by some of the parents who withdrew children from the school.

Poor administrative organization and communication: Four of the parents criticized the school for having poor administrative organization. These responses are also consistent with ones given previously.

School has insufficient resources in staff and funds: Three parents saw the school as shortchanged on resources, including space. Had the question been posed directly most would probably have expressed dissatisfaction about insufficient space and equipment.

Insufficient feedback from staff on academic work: After some considerations, comments that two parents made about not receiving feedback from teachers on the academic progress of their children were classified separately rather than with possibly related comments regarding insufficient academic work being done by the child. It should be noted in this regard that the teachers did hold parent conferences at the end of the year.

Responses given by one or two parents included the following:

Child worried about being able to do work in regular school
Widely-mixed age groups not appropriate
Lack of parental influence on the school
Child withdrew and wanted to stay home.

Probably the most important generalization from these responses is that, among parents whose children were presently enrolled, dissatisfaction with the school centered on concerns similar to those expressed by parents who had withdrawn their children: lack of structure in the academic program in the sense of supervision and teacher-pupil contact, and insufficient evidence of academic progress.

What Parents Saw Their Children as Learning

This final question proved to be rather difficult for parents to answer in a specific way. The same might be true for parents in a traditional school who perceived that they were being asked to itemize a variety of impressions. Four of the parents indicated that it was difficult to be specific, but expressed the belief that their children were learning. Three parents emphasized socialization skills such as getting along with others, including adults. Four mentioned a specific academic subject such as French or oceanography. Two mentioned non-academic subjects. One emphasized independence. Two parents emphasized the development of interests rather than learning, per se. One parent (about to withdraw the child) suggested "a need for rules and structure". One parent felt her child had learned nothing.

Plans for the Next School Year

When asked whether or not they planned to re-enter their children in LAAS in the Fall, nine of 12 parents responded in the affirmative for at least one child. Two of these were withdrawing at least one other child and one expressed some reservations. Three parents were withdrawing entirely, though one of these was uncertain about two of three children. The majority of parents of children in the Core sample thus plan to keep at least one child in the school.

Results: Intermediate and Advanced Sample

As indicated earlier, interviews of parents of Intermediate and Advanced students were recorded verbatim on tape. The analysis itself was made from typed transcripts of the interviews. In other respects the procedures of analysis used were the same as those described in Section VII.

It was possible to contact parents of 13 of the 16 students in the Intermediate and Advanced observation sample. As before, due to the small number of cases, raw frequencies rather than percentages will be reported.

Critisms of Previous Schools

Ten of the 13 parents interviewed cited criticisms of prior schooling experiences as reasons for enrolling in LAAS.

Child unhappy and disliked school: Five parents indicated that their children had developed negative feelings about the school. These parents were concerned about the possibility of the child dropping out of school entirely or refusing to go on to college. The parent of one of the high-achieving students (who, incidentally, was one of the Intermediate and Advanced students observed to be doing regular academic work during school hours) stated,

> It seemed to me that with every child it was getting more and more difficult to expect them to enjoy school or even stay in school.

Inadequate curriculum: Three of the parents felt that prior schools did not offer their children sufficient breadth and depth in learning opportunities. In this regard, a parent of a boy with high prior achievement test scores indicated that her son had "used up" everything the previous school had to offer. Responses given by at least one parent included:

- Low academic performance
- Interpersonal problems with peers
- Not learning independence
- Too much regimentation.

Fear that the child might drop-out of school entirely is naturally a concern peculiar to the parents of secondary school students. Surprisingly, three of the five parents who expressed such fears were referring to children in the high-achieving half of the observation sample. The number of cases is unfortunately too small to permit conclusions about trends. Still, it was speculated earlier (Section III) that the LAAS student body might contain an unusually high proportion of students who were disenchanted with previous schooling experiences. If a similar proportion of potential school drop-outs existed in the Intermediate and Advanced group as a whole, then the rehabilitation effort being undertaken by the school would be of very significant magnitude.

Expectations at LAAS

Not as many of the reasons Intermediate and Advanced parents gave for enrolling their children in LAAS had to do with specific expectations about the school. Negative reactions to prior schooling experiences appear to have been the dominant motivating factor for most parents in this group.

Approval of philosophy or concept of LAAS: Four of the 13 parents expressed general approval of plans for the school. None of these parents mentioned specifically the "open-structured" concept, which is understandably of greater interest to parents of younger children.

Two parents cited interest in the proposed curriculum and one made the choice because an admired teacher at the prior school was joining the staff at LAAS.

How LAAS Has Met Parents' Expectations

Ten of the 13 parents reported that their expectations about the school had been met in one or more ways. Two stated that their expectations had not been met in any way. Another suggested that the school had improved in the sense of "not leaving the kids alone so much" (as at the beginning of the year).

Child happier and more interested in school: Six of the 13 parents reported that their children were happier at LAAS and more interested in school. This was attributed in part to personal relationships with teachers and peers, and in part to the generally freer atmosphere at the school.

Able to follow own interests and work independently: Five of the thirteen parents emphasized the development of independence in their children. One parent reported:

> He's had exceedingly good teachers, he has really had a chance to follow up on those things that interest him, and it's been just great in all respects for him.

Another stated,

> He follows up on things about which he has a natural curiosity. He was doing academically very well at his previous school, but I would say now, in the light of the sort of unfolding I've seen in him, that in the previous school he was kind of like a zombie. He did what he was told. But now he really reaches out.

As far as these parents are concerned, the school's approach to developing independence and responsibility was successful for their children.

As was the case for the Core sample, the most common positive response of Intermediate and Advanced parents emphasized the fact that their children were now, for various reasons, happier about going to school.

How LAAS Did Not Meet Expectations of Parents

Ten of the 13 parents had at least one criticism of the school.

Insufficient supervision or direct attempts to motivate child: Six of the 13 parents saw the school as not taking a sufficiently active role in monitoring what the students were doing and in motivating them to do more. For example, one parent said,

> I felt it was a three way thing. It was not all their (the children's) problem. Some of it was faculty problems, some of it was the children, their own personality. They're not very aggressive. They're typically shy. Since they don't make any trouble, they get lost in the shuffle. I think it does take a more aggressive child to take advantage of that kind of set up.

In this and other similar responses one can probably infer that the parent is also saying, though indirectly, that the child was not learning enough.

Not studying or getting basic skills: Four of the parents indicated specifically that their children were not learning enough in the academic area. Two of these parents had also made comments classified in the previous sub-category. If frequencies for this and the previous sub-category were combined, we would have eight of the parents apparently concerned about insufficient attempts on the part of teachers to get their children to work. One parent said, for example,

> I think that one of the things a school like this has to tell a student like ______ is that, yes, we have expectations that you're really going to become someone who is interested in learning. I think that message has got to be given to the student by the school. One of the things I would like to change is that the message comes across very clearly.

Some of the comments reported below at least suggest that some other parents were not satisfied that their children were learning enough in the academic area. This can be interpreted as parental confirmation of conclusions drawn from observations of students during school hours reported in Section IV, as well as of statements made by teachers themselves as summarized in Section V. Most of the formal learning activities tabulated in the observational study, it will be recalled, were attributable to only three of the 16 students in the Intermediate and Advanced sample. Information from the interviews reported here suggests that most of the parents of those same students did not feel that there was sufficient emphasis on formal learning. On the other hand, in most cases these same parents liked other aspects of the school and intend to re-enroll their children next year, as will be reported below.

Comments made by one or two parents include the following:

Child does not keep planned schedule and school does not appear to care

Confused, disorganized atmosphere and lack of rules or structure

Lack of space and facilities

Superficial coverage of subjects

Greater parent participation needed

As in the case of the Core sample, the dominant concern of Intermediate and Advanced parents has to do with insufficient time being spent on formal learning activities.

What Parents Saw Their Children as Learning

Two of the 13 parents indicated that they did feel that their child was learning. Two more were uncertain in the sense that, while they were unwilling to say the child was not learning, they could think of no specific examples.

Independent problem-solving and being able to work on own: Four of the parents saw their children as having become more independent and resourceful as learners. One parent reported, for example,

> I think that she has gained a great deal of independence and the ability to study on her own and a desire to want to do this when she isn't under supervision. I think this is the most important thing, especially if you go on to college.

Has learned socialization skills with peers and adults: Three parents emphasized the development of more effective social skills on the part of the child.

Academic progress: Three of the parents mentioned one or more specific academic areas in which their child was working.

The following responses were among those given by one or two parents:

Acquired a great deal of general information

Learned that caring adults can help

Developed particular interests

More helpful at home

Plans for the Next School Year

Eight of the 13 parents reported that their children would definitely be enrolled at LAAS again next year. One other parent planned to re-enroll one child and withdraw another. One was uncertain, and three had definitely decided to withdraw.

Conclusions

In general, interviews of parents of children still enrolled at the school at the end of the 1972-73 school year provided information that paralleled that obtained from parents of children who had been withdrawn. Unlike the latter, however, most of these parents planned to remain. Why is this the case?

Although both groups of parents had similar criticisms of the school, the majority of the parents of children still enrolled did have positive reactions to other aspects of the school. Both groups tended to express dissatisfaction with the amount of formal learning going on, and attributed this situation to policies of the school. But parents of children still enrolled stressed that their children were, for a variety of reasons, happier in school now than they had been formerly. A second positive reaction had to do with the feeling on the part of some of the latter that the school was successful in developing traits such as resourcefulness and independence.

In spite of the fact that most parents in this group are planning to keep their children in the school, they also perveive that the staff of the school deliberately does not play an activist role in the sense of getting students involved in study activities. Does this perception of the parents have any significance for the future? One wonders if these parents, many of whose children were quite unhappy with previous schooling experiences, will continue to wait indefinitely for signs of progress in the academic area. As was evident in Section V, the staff of the school anticipates that many or all of the children will begin to show progress when they have had sufficient time to learn how to use the freedom that LAAS provides. In spite of changes planned for next year, this view on the part of the teaching staff makes dramatic changes in the role of the teacher unlikely in the near future. If it turns out that a significant number of children do not get involved in academic learning, then the staff and at least some of the parents may be on a potential collision course.

SECTION IX

INTERVIEWS OF INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED STUDENTS

The Students

Fifty-one or 25% of those students assigned to Intermediate and Secondary level advisors were randomly selected for interviews. The interviews were designed to get at the perspective of the older students toward the school and their role in it. (Similar interviews were not conducted with Core students.) All but one of the Intermediate and Advanced students sampled was eventually interviewed, the exception being a student who was apparently enrolled in a different school and who appeared at LAAS only on rare occasions.

The following table reflects the racial/sexual distribution of the interviewees:

Table IX-1

Distribution of Intermediate
and Advanced Interviewees by Race and Sex

Category	No.	Percent
White females	15	30
White males	11	22
Black females	3	6
Black males	4	8
Chicano females	6	12
Chicano males	7	14
Oriental females	2	4
Other* males	2	4
	50	100

*1 Indian; 1 Oriental/Black

These percentages comprising the interview sample are approximately the same as those represented in the total Intermediate and Advanced enrollment.

All but nine of the interviewees had attended LAAS for the full year. These nine exceptions had entered at the beginning of the second semester.

The Interviews

The interview schedule consisted of a series of open-ended questions that were developed after a number of informal talks about the school had been conducted with students. The interviewer recorded answers in writing on the schedule form. A copy of the schedule is reproduced in Appendix II. Most of the questions were specific enough to permit relatively brief answers. The kinds of questions asked need not be summarized here as their nature will become apparent as the results are summarized below.

All of the interviews were conducted at the school and each lasted approximately fifteen minutes. The interviewer began with a brief explanation of the over-all purpose of the evaluation study: "We want both your negative and positive opinions in order to help other schools such as this one avoid mistakes and capitalize on good points."

Answers to the questions were categorized in terms of responses to individual questions. Since students expressed opinions on some issues more than once, responses regarding most of the categories summarized below were totalled from the entire questionnaire; in this way the same opinion was not counted more than once for the same student. However, students often gave more than one response to the same question. For example, there might be two or three reasons why a given student "liked the school". Thus, when frequencies for different responses within a given category are reported below, a given student might be represented in more than one total frequency or percentage.

Results

What Students Liked About the School: Of those interviewed, 17 or 34% of the students liked the school because they were able to choose what they wanted to do, rather than being forced to do things. This response is consistent with the nine or 18% who said they felt free in this school, or the six or 12% who said that they liked its "openness". Two people liked being able to propose ideas for new classes. Although some of these responses may reflect more than one choice for the same individual, many occurred independently of each other.

In addition to the general sentiments of freedom which were expressed, many responses were more specific. Nineteen students or 38% felt that there were more choices available at LAAS, and four or 8% specifically mentioned that they liked the opportunity to obtain college level classes (or high school level classes in the case of younger students). Thirteen students or 26% especially liked being able to proceed at their own pace. Other additional options available at the school, such as receiving credit for individual interest areas, were appreciated by two students or 4% and one student appreciated her freedom to arrange her schedule so she could both work and go to class.

Some responses reflected a liking for the school because of its avoidance of negative factors often associated with school. Four students or 8% remarked on the lack of competition at LAAS. The fact that there are no bells at the school was mentioned by six students or 12%, and two students liked being able to sign in rather than having roll call. Seven or 14% liked "not having to go to class" or not having to do things by a set deadline. Finally, 17 or 34% generally stated that the LAAS was better than their old school.

A total of 13 students or 26% felt that they were learning more in this school than they had in previous schools of attendance. It is difficult to say whether this feeling could be attributed to the atmosphere of freedom of choice or to greater "affectivity" (to be discussed in a later section), and it is also hard to say whether the teachers are of higher quality than those in other schools (mentioned by six students or 12%). The method of teaching seemed better than those experienced previously by two students.

Feelings About Advisors: When students were asked about their advisors almost all responses were positive. The reasons given present an interesting picture of students' definitions of a "good" teacher. Many students (14 or 28%) simply stated that the teacher was "nice". Others stated that the teacher was "all right", but others were more specific. The largest number of specific comments centered around the teacher's ability to understand or communicate with the student (nine or 18%), but additional comments might be included in this area such as, "he (or she) sees me as an individual" (two or 4%), or "she (or he) is interested in helping me do what I want" (five or 10%). Another two students said they saw their advisor more as a person than as a teacher. Honesty (two students or 4%), or trustworthiness (one student), were also appreciated. Students also liked their advisors because they did not pressure them (eight or 16%), and were not harsh (one), or did not get mad if things were not done on time (one). Other students liked their teachers for making them get things done (one), trying to get them into classes (two or 4%), making them do things on their own (one), or telling them what is required (two or 4%). In this capacity the teacher may be seen as a facilitator for action. In judging their advisors as teachers, six students (12%) stated that their advisor was a good teacher and knew a lot, one student liked the teacher's enthusiasm, and another commented on a teacher who made classes interesting. Organizational ability impressed other students who liked teachers who were always at school (one), or who "knew what was happening" (two or 4%).

From these comments it appears that from a student's viewpoint a good teacher is understanding, and does not pressure the individual but rather provides encouragement to learn by showing interest in the student and demonstrating knowledge of the subject matter and academic requirements.

Types of Classes Students Were Taking: Each of the interviewed students was asked to name the classes they were taking. The number of "traditionally academic" classes was averaged for the group in order to determine whether students were electing or avoiding basic courses such as math, English, science and languages. Since students are not required to take any particular class, a few (four or 8%) did not report taking "academic" classes at all. However, a majority of the students, (35 or 70%), stated that they were taking classes to fulfill requirements, while 33 or 66% stated preparation for college as their reason. The average number of "academic" classes being taken by students was slightly over two classes per individual. A number of students took classes outside the alternative school (mostly art classes, but also some college-preparatory classes at nearby schools). The open scheduling of classes allowed such arrangements to be easily made. In addition, many students took part in field trips and "ecology-type" classes which involved camping, hiking, or fact-finding within the city. Students were also able to learn-by-doing in such classes as welding, auto mechanics, or workshops that involved both preparation for a fair at the school and learning about the historical and sociological aspects of the era to be emphasized (Renaissance in the Fall, "Roaring Twenties" in the Spring).

The courses were conducted in a variety of formats ranging from individual study to small-group efforts. Topics were traditional or were re-worded to make them sound more interesting, such as "English for Students Who Hate English", "Violence in America", and "Geodesic Domes".

It should be stated here that the listing of classes by students does not mean that they attended all classes. In some cases students indicated that they seldom attended classes. However, several teachers stated in their interviews that these students often worked on "individual projects". According to an Intermediate teacher, one of the problems in some advisor-advisee relationships was that where there was no class contact, it was difficult for the advisor to assess student capabilities and degree of effort. To deal with this problem, students will be asked next year to select a teacher as an advisor only if they are taking a class from that teacher.

How Students Learn They Have Completed a Class: The confusion over the ending point of classes reflects another problem regarding class participation. Several students (seven or 14%) simply did not know how to tell when they had completed a course. Other students (11 or 22%) stated that they make this decision based on the goal sheets which they fill out at the end of each month describing what they have accomplished in a particular class. Some students depended on the teacher to say when the class was over (three or 6%), or did not meet anymore (12 or 24%), when requirements such as reading a book were met (6 or 12%), or when a class ended because people lost interest in it (one).

Other students (17 or 34%) assumed the responsibility themselves and decided "when they had learned enough" or simply wanted to quit. Some students made a personal assessment of their own ability with one student saying the class would end when it was possible to "keep up with the others", one mentioning the ability to do passing work, another the capacity to feel confidence in one's ability, and two stating that they would complete a course when they had no more questions and were able to understand the subject.

On a more negative level, seven or 14% simply stated that a class would end "when I get tired of it". Some students (10 or 20%) felt that a class did not need to end but could continue indefinitely. These varied responses perhaps reflect that learning on a topic does not need to end at an artificial stopping point such as the end of the semester. However, the previous answers also reflect the fact that the school has not established, or at least has not communicated criteria for determining when a course is completed. Individuals are encouraged to assess their own learning on a topic (often with teacher assistance).

Criticisms Relating to Instruction: Although the responses described earlier reflect a generally positive attitude toward various aspects of instruction, two students felt that the school was good primarily for those students who were able to discipline themselves to work independently. A few students mentioned that at the first of the year it was difficult for them to adjust to this kind of independence. Seven students or 14% felt that because some students play all day more structure was needed for them. One student merely stated that more organization was needed although nine students (18%) felt that there was some structure and that they were learning responsibility similar to the demands of the "outside world". The crowded atmosphere and lack of space was distracting to two students who felt that it was too noisy or that "little kids get in their way".

On the whole, most students made either positive or excited responses to the school; only two students were neutral and only two felt negative toward the school as a whole. Seven students (14%) actually stated that they did not think they would be in school at all if it were not for LAAS.

Affective Relationships: Interpersonal relations and self development is stressed at LAAS. A large number of interviewees, 31 or 62%, commented that they know people better at LAAS than they had at other schools or that they felt closer to people at LAAS. Some students used the word "love" to describe these relationships and three said the school was like a "family"; in this respect the reference was to interaction with teachers as well as students. Six students or 12% stated that teachers were "nice" and three students liked calling teachers by their first names. Eight students or 16% stated that teachers gave students individualized attention.

Among peers there seemed to be little competitive pressure. Five students or 10% liked the absence of cliques. Twelve or 24% mentioned that they liked LAAS because there were no fights at the school. (There were reports of earlier encounters at the school, but interaction among the races at the time of the interviews appeared to be extensive and warm.) Two minority students commented on the improvement in this area and most respondents felt no difficulty in this area to the point of making statements like "there are no differences", although three minority students felt that more minority representation was needed.

Reactions to Wide Age-Range of Student Body : Most of the interviewed students made no comment on the wide age-ranges represented in the school.

Thirteen or 26% expressed positive feelings about the presence of younger children. Only two students felt that the smaller children were in the way. One of the most surprising interviewer observations was the amount of positive interaction among young and old students, occurring spontaneously during the interviews and including affectionate physical contact. On the other hand, there were also a few instances of fighting observed among younger children and one case of two young boys hitting a high school girl.

Racial/Sexual Analysis of Responses: Minority students tended to be less open to the interviewer than white students. Out of eight students considered "reticent to questioning" by the interviewer, seven were black or Chicano. However, no one refused to answer questions and, on the contrary, most students were quite open.

Minority students were less likely than white students to say they were taking classes for graduation or college, but slightly over half of the minority students were within these categories. Differences were greater between the sexes than among the races, with more females than males being academically inclined. Twenty-five students (50%) had specific college majors in mind, and 16 (32%) planned to go to college but were undecided on a major. Twelve, or most of these students, were minority students. Of the nine students who did not plan to go to college, three had "non-professional" careers in mind, two wanted to travel, and the remaining four had no idea what they were going to do or had vague philosophies such as being "self-supporting" or wanting "everything to hit me".

Some minority students were less likely to be taking "academic" classes (black males, Chicano females, and other males) but Chicano males and Oriental females were more likely than whites to be taking these classes.

With regard to opinions about the school, most negative opinions came from black females or Chicano males and these appeared to be more critical of the school's lack of structure for some students (often not themselves), rather than showing negative feeling for personal treatment (no references were made to this topic). Out of the four students who specifically stated neutral (two) or negative (two) feelings regarding the school as a whole, two students were Chicanos (one neutral, one negative), one was a Chicano male (negative), and one was a black female (negative); but all gave positive as well as negative opinions about the school in the rest of their interviews.

Reactions to Physical Characteristics of the School: Seventeen students or 34% voiced a desire for more space at the school. The need for a place to store individual belongings and other equipment was expressed by three students (6%) and two students (4%) wanted more privacy. Five students (10%) wanted better facilities and four (8%) wanted more ecological "amenities" such as trees, grass, etc. Two students disliked having the school close at 2:00 P.M. Several students were aware that littering was a problem at the school and four (8%) felt that the school was messy and needed to be kept clean by students. These responses are probably a fairly accurate reflection of the general dislike of a crowded and somewhat austere building that was not intended for use as a school.

Organizational Decision Making: A greater degree of student participation and opportunity for student involvement in decision making is potentially available at LAAS than at most schools. Few students, however, care to participate in decision making. Although 29 or 58% stated that they felt they were involved as much as they wanted to be, this response actually meant they were seldom involved or merely participated on a limited basis. Fourteen or 28%

said they were not involved and did not care to be. Three students said that they had been more involved, but withdrew because of conflicts with work schedules, going to meets that were boring, and encountering adults who would not take their ideas seriously.

Only six students expressed a desire to be more involved, but cited conflicts such as other activities (three students), not being more outgoing (one student), not being an adult (one student), or not being picked by advisors to participate in the Coordinating Council (one student). In spite of these answers, many students worked on the fairs which were held at the school and helped to develop activities or facilities (such as helping to organize back-packing trips or the building of a geodesic dome play-structure on the playground). Two students particularly mentioned pride in helping to fix up the art room or to raise money for the school. Several mentioned that they would be involved if any action was needed.

Student involvement thus appears to be of a limited nature in decision-making. The barrier to full student participation may be as much due to the student's own disinterest in such participation as it is to the fact that adults are perceived as not paying attention; any decision-making meeting is boring if one is not interested in the outcome.

Reasons for Attending LAAS and Plans to Continue Schooling at LAAS: Opinions about the school may be influenced by the original reasons for attending LAAS. Thirty-one or 62% of the students interviewed became interested in attending on their own. For 17 or 34% their parents wanted them to attend. Many simply disliked their old school (15 or 30%), were getting bored (two or 4%), were not learning much (two or 4%), or were having problems or were "kicked out" of their previous school (three or 6%). Additional reasons for coming to LAAS included involvement in planning for the school by family, friends, or themselves (six or 12%), the desire for more freedom, flexibility, or responsibility (six or 12%), and one person had heard that more minorities were needed.

Thirty-six or 72% of those interviewed plan to return to the school next year. Six or 12% of the remaining students were graduating seniors. Of the remaining seven students, two were unsure of their plans, and only five or 10% stated they would not return. Of those who planned to stay, most students simply gave their reason as liking the school (18 or 36%), or saw it as a better alternative than other schools (three or 6%). Ten or 20% stated that they could not "stand" to return to more traditional schools. Four students felt they were learning more than at other schools. Other students cited more freedom at LAAS. Of those who planned to stay, three stated that their parents were considering taking them out and one of the students who was uncertain about re-enrollment gave the same reason.

All of those who were undecided or felt they would not return were minority students. Of those who said they would not come back, three (black male, black female, Chicano male) gave parental decisions as the reason; i.e., two parents felt the student was not learning enough and one did not like signing papers and paying for bus fare. Two students (black female, Chicano female) wanted to graduate with their friends, and one Chicano female stated simply that she did not want to continue at the school but gave no further reason.

In looking at the reasons given for enrolling in the school it seems that these students and their parents may have had only a vague understanding of the nature of LAAS, but strongly disliked the old school. Possibly the extent of "openness" or lack of structure at LAAS contrasted so severely with the previous experiences of parents and students that they were unable to adapt. It is also possible that the expectations of minority parents may have been more divergent from the school goals than those of white parents. Another hypothesis might be that the small minority enrollment might contribute to greater feelings of isolation for some minority students who sought association with old friends.

Comparison with Other Schools: The students interviewed had previously attended a variety of other schools. Los Angeles high schools included Eagle Rock, Marshall, Franklin, Fairfax, Lincoln, and Pacific. Junior high schools included King, Irving, Ivanhoe, Virgil and Luther Burbank. A number of students had attended parochial schools.

When asked to compare LAAS with their previous schools, students cited a variety of differences. While specific responses, varying somewhat in terms of the different schools they refer to, will not be cited here, certain trends are apparent. Most common was an expressed dislike of "regimentation" implied by bells, inflexible scheduling, restrictions on movement, and the like. This is, of course, consistent with the resounding approval these same students gave to the freedom of choice available at LAAS.

Other common responses to this question included the desire to be away from fighting (and for some schools, gangs), dislike of impersonal relationships with teachers, and being bored in class. Again, these kinds of negative comparisons with other schools parallel the students' positive reactions to LAAS.

Summary and Conclusions

In a number of respects the interviews of Intermediate and Secondary students were not as informative as the evaluation team had hoped. This may have been because the interviews were conducted very early in the project, perhaps too early for the team to be aware of all of the critical questions. In view of the results presented in Section IV, which show a low frequency of formal learning activities during school hours among the Intermediate and Advanced observation sample, the team should have interrogated the students more closely on what they were learning at school.

Also emerging from the interviews, however, is a sense of uncertainty about what it means at LAAS to "take a class". Students generally did not articulate a consistent or even coherent conception of criteria or standards defining the "completion" of a class. This finding may well be consistent with the notion that significant learning is on-going and cannot be terminated by artificial boundaries such as quarters or semesters. Still, the responses of the students, at least, lead one to wonder how the decision is made as to whether or not something analogous to a "credit" in the traditional school system has been achieved. It is unfortunate that time and resources did not permit the evaluation team to deal with this question through direct observation.

A third finding of this particular study also relates to this issue. Students reported that they could choose any teacher as an advisor, which often meant that there was no classroom contact between advisors and advisees. This again raises questions about the process by which student progress at the secondary level was assessed and monitored. However, the staff's decision that in the future students will be required to select advisors from among the teachers with whom they are actually taking classes indicates that this problem has been recognized and acted upon.

It is clearly the case that students can select their own classes and attend those classes when they choose to. This is consistent with the school's overall policy of developing responsibility in students through the device of actually assigning such responsibility. At the same time, this policy also means that at least some students can choose not to sign up for classes or not to attend class meetings. Once again we are confronted with the dilemma implied in the conflict between the strategy used by the school for developing independence and responsibility in learners, and the goal of getting all of the students to learn.

Turning to the students' own assessments of the school, it appears that the only clear-cut area in which the interviews expressed negative assessments of the school related to physical facilities such as space and equipment. Non-involvement in the decision-making process of the school, on the other hand, is probably more indicative of the greater interest adolescents typically show in the social forms of peer culture as compared to general disinterest in the work-related forms of the adult culture. Their contrasting willingness to be actively involved in social events such as fairs is indicative of this preference.

Finally, it is abundantly clear that the great majority of the students were positive toward the school and the teachers. Students especially liked being able to choose their own classes and the wide variety of such choices available. Certainly many of these choices incorporated subject-matter or types of activities unavailable in most, if not all, traditional schools.

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APPENDIX 1

LAAS STUDENT OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Coding System for Analysis of LAAS Student Observation Schedule

Activities Classified as Formal Study*

1.1 to 1.7, except 1.4 if reading was clearly recreational rather than indicative of formal study

2.1 to 2.4

3.1 to 3.4

4.1 and 4.2

5.3

8.1 and 8.2

9.2

Activities Classified as Production

5.1, 5.2, and 5.4

Activities Classified as Play or Other

1.4 if reading [illegible] clearly recreational

4.3

6.1 and 6.2

7.4 and 7.5

9.3

10 and 11

---

*The numbers refer to corresponding categories on the LAAS Student Observation Schedule.

LAAS Student Observation Schedule

Student ______________________ _____ Observer Initials ____________

Location ____

Date ________________ Time _________________

1. Engaged in study activity _____

   1.1 working primarily alone ____. If any interaction at all with teacher, aide, other, Describe ______________________________

   ____

   1.2 working in group _____ size _____

   1.3 using textbook _____

      1.3.1 reading solely _____

      1.3.2 reading and working problems or answering questions _____

   1.4 reading material other than text (story book, etc.) _____

   Describe ____

   1.5 using instructional kit or package ____ Describe ______________

   ____

   1.6 laboratory experiment or demonstration ____ Describe ____________

   ____

   1.7 other individual study ____ Describe _____________________

   ____

   1.8 content of activity ____________________________________

   ____

2. Receiving individual tutoring _____

   2.1 teacher _____

   2.2 aide (including trainee) _____

   2.3 parent _____

2.4 other student _____

2.4.1 older student _____

2.4.2 student of approximately same age _____

2.5 content of activity ____

3. Receiving group tutoring or teaching ____ size of group ____

3.1 teacher _____

3.2 aide (including trainee) _____

3.3 parent _____

3.4 other student _____

3.4.1 older student _____

3.4.2 student of approximately same age _____

3.5 content of activity ____

4. Organized discussion or meeting ____ Presence of leader(s) or other supervision ____ Describe ____

____

4.1 content primarily "academic" _____ Describe ____________________

____

4.2 content "issue" oriented (world affairs, social conditions, etc.) ____

Describe ____

____

4.3 content school related (governance, planning, personal relations, etc.)___

_____ Describe ____

5. Production Activity ____

5.1 art _____ Describe ____

5.2 music _____ Describe ____

5.3 writing (without resources such as texts, etc.) ____ Describe ________

____

5.4 other production ____ Describe ______________________________

6. Recreation and games (exclude production) _____

   6.1 game with rules _____

      6.1.1 athletic _____ Describe ______________________________

      6.1.2 mental _____ Describe ______________________________

   6.2 free play _____ Describe ______________________________

7. Informal conversation _____

   7.1 teacher or aide _____

   7.2 other student _____

   7.3 task-oriented vis a vis academic work (getting or giving information, explaining, etc.) _____ Describe ______________________________

   ____

   7.4 task-related vis a vis school (governance, interpersonal relations, information exchange, etc.) _____ Describe ______________________________

   ____

   7.5 non-task related _____ Describe ______________________________

   ____

8. Tutoring or supervising younger children _____

   8.1 helping with concepts or academic skills _____ Describe ______________

   ____

   8.2 reading stories _____

   8.3 supervising games _____

   8.4 other ____

9. Seeking information or guidance

   9.1 teacher _____ aide _____ other student _____

   9.2 relating to learning activity _____ Describe ______________________

   ____

   9.3 other ____

   ____

10. Wandering ____ Describe ____

11. Passivity, non-activity ____ Describe ______________________________

12. How was activity (or class of activities) selected? Interview student or staff members, to determine primary source. ______________________

____

____

____

13. What was basis of selection? Same procedure. Probe for evidence of consideration of interests, aptitudes, diagnosis of needs, etc.__________

____

____

14. Involvement of student: High _____ Moderate _____ Low _____

Describe ____

____

____

Additional Comments: ____

____

____

____

APPENDIX 2

LAAS INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

LAAS INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Date____________ Time____________

Name____________________ Race____________ Interviewer____________

Advanced____ Year____ Intermediate____ How long been here? All yr.____ This Semester____
What classes are you taking? Last semester?

Literature (Type)______________
Math (Type)__________________
Science______________________
Ecology______
Language______
Special Studies______________

____
____
____
____
____
____

Art(Total)____________
batik______
tie dye______
Auto Mechanics______
Welding______
Gym______ Other________
Foot Power______

Do you take classes anywhere else? Which:________________ Why:______________

How do you feel about this school?
Hate it_____ Negative_____ Neutral_____ Positive_____ Ecstatic (excited)_____

Positives
More choices_____
Less competition_____
No fights_____
Proceed at own pace_____
Other______________________________

Negatives
No instruction at my level_____ In____________
People are messy_____ Irresponsible_____
Not enough people at same age_____
Classes not available_____ In____________
Parents forced me to come_____
Other______________________________

Is there anything you would like to change here? No_____ Yes_____

(Openness to questioning)

won't talk or closed____ reticent____ doesn't matter____ interested____ extremely open (happy to talk)____

What school did you go to before?__________ How would you compare this school to your old school?

Positive

Negative

Who is your advisor?____________________
How was he (she) selected?______________
How do you feel about this person?__________________

Do you think you could begin on your own in (insert specific class)______________ if you had not had your experience at your previous school? Yes___ No___

How do you know when you complete a course? Take test___ Complete Requirements___

Why did you come to this school? Parents wanted me to _____ Heard about it and wanted to come _____ Other ____

What are your goals? Graduation______ Go to college to be__________Other____________

Are you taking courses to prepare you for graduation? Yes___ No___For college?Yes___No___

(If not a senior) Do you plan to stay here next year? Yes___ No___ Why?__________________

____

Are you involved in decisions here?
Not involved, don't care to be_____
Wants to be involved and is involved as much as wants______
Wants to be more involved (prevented by________________)______
More involved than wants to be: Does too much for school____is asked for more involvement than desires______

How do you feel about the relationships among people here? e.g., among the races, different sexes or your own friends?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your reaction to the school or anything prompted by these questions?